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John Wilkes Gun & Rifle Manufacturer

A Family History

Stephen Grist

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A pair of John Wilkes 12 Bore sidelocks Nos 13802/3 made in 1936 for W.W. Dowding. Considered by his sons to be Jack Wilkes' masterpiece. (Photo courtesy of Gavin Gardiner Ltd)

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Preface

My interest in collecting guns began when still a student in the second half of the 1960s. Until then I had been shooting with sound but unexceptional guns. Finding that I had a small amount of money accumulated after a summer holiday job, I bought an 1870 Grant hammer gun for the then quite significant price of £50. It was an example that had been regularly stripped over the years so came to pieces easily, allowing me to examine the quality of its internal workings, and then to wonder how on earth such a gun was made. I had heard these high-quality guns often referred to as hand made, but it was far from clear to me, with a rudimentary knowledge of wood and metal working, how such a thing could be made by hand.

A year or two later, when one or two more guns had been added to the collection, I started to look for somewhere to get work done on old best guns at a quality that matched that of the original manufacture. Around 1970 the gun trade was having a tough time, many of the smaller firms were sending work out, so customers almost never got to talk to anyone who even understood what needed to be done, let alone the person who was actually going to do it. As a regular reader of the Shooting Times I came across an article, I think it was by G.L. Carlisle, extolling the virtues of John Wilkes as the last surviving family run gunmaking firm in central London with a shop and factory at the same premises. As I worked less than a mile from their shop, I made a short detour to 79 Beak Street one morning on my way in. An inspection of the building from the street revealed that they were probably still in business, but at 9:30 in the morning were certainly closed. One or two more visits were required before I finally found them open and worked out how to attract attention to a potential customer waiting outside a conspicuously padlocked front door.

They undertook my first job, nitro proofing an early hammerless Woodward, very successfully and, as I was to discover, unusually quickly. I was soon a regular visitor, bringing in other work and looking for guns to add to the collection. Before long, I think on my third visit, I was invited to the upstairs workshop, an Aladdin's cave of gunmaking, where examples of every conceivable gun and rifle component and tool that might have been used in the two previous centuries were to be found. My job at the time allowed me plenty of free time, and it was not long before I was working part time in the workshop undertaking small jobs on my own guns under John and Tom Wilkes' guidance, and later moving on to work on other guns. Gradually the mystery of how guns were made by hand was unravelled. Whilst I was on this steep learning curve, the brothers would ply me with a steady stream of stories of the trade, both based on their own experiences of it during and since the War, and second-hand accounts of their father's and grandfather's dating back well into the 19th century. After about ten years, a new job meant that I had far less free time, so the opportunity to work at the bench was much diminished, but I remained a regular visitor, a close friend and occasional customer of the firm for a quarter of a century until they closed in 2003.

I was there on their last day in 79 Beak Street in July of that year, a day on which John and Tom had to make final decisions about where the remaining bits and pieces in the shop would go. They had left themselves with an enormous box containing about 80 bound ledgers dating from their earliest records through to around 1967. I had seen these on shelves in the back shop for many years. Having almost never having had to refer to these in the previous 35 years, I think they had planned to discard them, but John was loath to do that. I was given them on loan, along with as much as I could take of various bundles of supporting paperwork of a similar vintage. These remained untouched at home for two years until retirement gave me the opportunity to start trying to digest their contents.

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I had thought for many years that the brothers' stories of the trade should have been put on record. Others had the same feeling and although one or two attempts to document these had been made, nothing substantial had ever appeared in print. As I started to get drawn into decoding the content of the ledgers and the tens of thousands of transactions they documented, I realised that they revealed a great deal about not just the history of the firm of John Wilkes, but also, about the way this trade operated in London and Birmingham. As Wilkes were predominantly a trade gunmaker, there were to be found in the ledgers the details of a high volume and wide variety of transactions covering at some point almost all of the key players in the trade. The brothers' stories, rather than being sufficient on their own, serve to illuminate and make real the rather dry history concealed in the ledgers. As the work of understanding the business progressed, the need to put in context the various individuals that either figured prominently in the brother's anecdotes or with whom the firm had significant dealings also became apparent, necessitating widening the research sources beyond the ledgers themselves.

When Tom and John retired in 2003, they kept for their own reference most of the firm's books for the period since 1968 but after their deaths, in 2009 and 2010 respectively, the family were kind enough to let me have access to these records as well, allowing a complete picture to be built of the John Wilkes business over a period of 75 years. Out of respect for those customers and suppliers still living, the account that follows has less detail of transactions in last few decades than it does of the period up to the 1960s.

This history is the result of research undertaken over a ten-year period. It is long and quite detailed in places. I have worked on the assumption that it is unlikely that anyone will want to repeat my trawl through the ledgers and I have therefore noted as much as I can find that might be of interest to the owners of guns and rifles made by the firm or those with wider interest in the workings of the London gun trade in the 20th century. By inserting the occasional story and by keeping the histories of some of the key individuals in boxed sections I hope I have struck a balance between length, readability and completeness. Nevertheless, a vast amount of the information extracted from sources has ended up on the cutting room floor.

I could not have undertaken this without the help of others. First and foremost, my thanks must go posthumously to the Wilkes brothers, John William Harrison Wilkes and Thomas Frederick Wilkes. Their help and encouragement in explaining to a complete novice the workings of their family's trade provided the material for most of this book and their pride in the quality of the work of four previous generations of their family, particularly that of their father Jack, was the inspiration to complete it. I am deeply indebted to Craig Whitsey and his wife Frances for their many recollections of his 35 years with the firm, and for much detailed information and assistance in the decade or more since leaving Beak Street. I am extremely grateful to members of the Wilkes family, especially to Tom's daughter Heidi and her husband Neil, for providing the most recent records of the firm and a number of family photographs. Without their help this volume would have been much truncated. Nigel Brown very kindly provided some of the source material relating to the Wilkes business for his encyclopaedic three volume work on British Gunmakers as well as numerous conversations in which he shared his recollections of the firm. Robert Hodges kindly gave me access to his history of the involvement of four generations of his family in the trade, most notably that of his great, great grandfather Edwin. I am very grateful to Malcolm Appleby for his anecdotes of his time with the firm and for the details and pictures of the guns he engraved for them. I am indebted to John Rothery, David W.Brown, and Mike Gilding for their recollections of their dealings with the firm, to Daryl Hallquist for information about a very early Wilkes gun in his collection and to Robin Mann of the Riflemaker Gallery for showing me 79 Beak Street in its recent form. I would also like to thank the auction houses that deal regularly in guns and rifles, particularly Gavin Gardiner and Sotheby's, but also Holts,

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Christie Mansion & Woods and Bonham's. Their catalogues and the photos they contain have provided an invaluable record and source of information in the preparation of the book, and some of their images are reproduced to illustrate the text.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Jackie and our family for putting up with this incomprehensible obsession for more than a decade.

Stephen Grist
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Britain has been at the forefront of the craft of making, mostly by hand, high quality sporting guns and rifles for well over two centuries[1]. The products of this trade have an enduring fascination, not just for those that make them, but also for the many others that either collect these sporting firearms, or use them in the field – or both. The qualities of these finest guns and rifles speak for themselves. They have an elegance of appearance and smoothness of function that makes them stand apart from modern mass produced alternatives, even though their specifications are often much the same as their modern counterparts. The handmade gun or rifle embodies all the finest attributes of Victorian craftsmanship in wood and metal. Flowing lines, elegant decoration, perfection of design, reliability, performance and ease of operation all come together in these shooting tools.

The extraordinary longevity of the finest handmade guns is the factor that probably does more than anything else to keep alive the interest in them. There are muzzle loading guns from 200 years ago that are still usable, albeit with care. The earliest breechloaders from about 150 years ago are frequently found in occasional use, some with modern ammunition, and by the time we reach hammerless guns made up to 135 years ago we find them in regular sporting use in the field. So today's sportsmen have a genuine choice between recently produced machine made firearms, many of which are made overseas, the most affordable of which have little hand work in them, and older handmade guns or rifles, most of which are of British manufacture, which are often in the same price bracket. The recent book by Diggory Hadoke[18] is a good example of several that extol the virtues of shooting with these older firearms.

That sportsmen have a genuine choice to use traditionally made guns that are generations old is undoubtedly a factor in promoting the interest in them and in the people that made them. This would surely be much diminished if the guns made in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been less durable or if technical developments had made them obsolete to the point where they were unusable today. Most would have been scrapped and the few that had survived would now be confined to display cases in much the way that golf clubs and tennis racquets of that vintage are now seen.

The gun trade made enormous technical advances between the flintlock muzzle loaders of 1820 and the hammerless ejector of 1885, but thereafter technical developments were much slower. A few very busy and prosperous decades in the middle of the nineteenth century, equipping and re-equipping a growing shooting community with the latest variants as they were developed, were followed by a slowing down as the shooting community gradually gravitated towards using hammerless ejectors. The trade of making guns and rifles was of a size that was going to prove unsustainable in the twentieth century unless new developments were to come along that would encourage shooters to re-equip themselves again.

The gunmakers tried to keep the momentum going; nitro powders displaced gunpowder and new forging techniques allowed shorter and lighter steel barrels to replace damascus, single triggers were introduced that were supposed to make a quicker second shot possible, and the under and over barrel configuration was developed and promoted to provide a cleaner sighting line. Despite these developments, by 1935, most of the best guns of the day were much the same as those of 40 years earlier, and the older ones were probably still working faultlessly. So the trade became a victim of its own success in producing such durable products. Furthermore, Britain's dominant position in global trade in Victorian times was weakened considerably after the First World War

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and collapsed almost entirely after the Second, so by the middle of the twentieth century the market for the British gun trade was also much reduced.

At the start of the twentieth century there were hundreds of firms trading as gunmakers across the country. Not all of these made guns themselves – some merely resold guns made by others on which the seller's name had been inscribed, but there were nevertheless a large number of firms engaged in the manufacturing process. Nigel Brown's[7,8] encyclopaedic work recently extended to a third volume[9], catalogues these firms in meticulous detail, both the manufacturers and the re-sellers, along with many of those working in their supporting trades.

The century started well. The Edwardian era was one of prosperity and world dominance for Britain and the gun trade reflected this. In 1911, Boss & Co., then at the height of their prosperity with a workshop staff of about 40, took orders that were fulfilled for 180 best guns. Many of the other makers at the time enjoyed similar levels of activity, although even in this period Christopher Austyn[2] reports, in his account of the gun engraving trade, that Dickson's of Edinburgh were complaining to their engraver John Sumner about the slackness of the trade for much of 1907. A few makers went under in the period before the First World War. Bozard was one such, but usually not for reasons associated with shortage of business. The enormous upheaval of the war itself generated for the trade enough war work to keep most of the gunmakers afloat for its duration. But the aftermath of the war and its attendant social and financial impact was to set the trade on a period of decline which was gradual at first, indeed there was a somewhat patchy resurgence in the immediate aftermath of the war. Both Boss and Purdey saw levels of business quickly return to pre-war levels, driven to a large extent by an American economy that was booming, having been positively affected by a war in which its manufacturing industry had prospered. Other makers were less fortunate, some being forced into mergers to reduce costs such as that between Stephen Grant and Joseph Lang, whose businesses were combined in 1925. The Birmingham trade, on which the entire gun trade depended for everything from component parts to complete guns, took some time to recover after having been almost entirely turned over to war work. Nevertheless, the twenties saw a modest rebuilding of the trade.

The real shock came at the end of the twenties with the depression that forced a further and more far reaching round of mergers and closures, with even the strongest firms in the trade struggling to keep going as orders collapsed and difficult choices were made about laying off master craftsmen. In this period the need to raise capital resulted in many of the firms that had hitherto been privately run family businesses becoming limited companies with small numbers of investors as shareholders, often drawn from outside the trade. There was enough pressure on prices to force deflation for a short period and continental imports were seen as a competitive threat to the bespoke trade. Burrard's[10] three volume work on the Modern Shotgun, first published in 1931, devoted much of its content to making the case for the handmade best British gun against lower quality indigenous and continental rivals. Beesley, Lancaster and Harrison & Hussey all collapsed into Grant & Lang during the depression. But as the thirties progressed, the trade gradually picked up, the US market returned and by the second half of the decade London was producing some of the finest work ever, albeit in modest quantity.

Guns of this vintage have attracted a premium in the second-hand market for many years; one that shows no sign of abating as the number of well-preserved examples from this period diminishes. There have been extensive discussions as to whether this premium is justified – some of the arguments against it coming from those with an interest in promoting the sales of the modern alternative. One of the factors unique to this time was that there was a surplus of highly skilled craftsmen, many of whom had been apprenticed around the turn of the 19th century, who were all competing for a limited amount of work. So guns made in the 1930s had a higher proportion of

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best work in them from the master men than had been normal in more prosperous times and this was reflected in the quality of the end product. As this generation of craftsmen retired, which most of them would by 1950, this oversupply of skill dried up and would never be repeated. The remainder of the century would be characterised by skill shortages, sometimes desperate ones.

The Second World War brought this era of modest success to an abrupt close. Again, a raft of war work meant that the majority of gunmaking firms could find profitable ways of keeping going through the war despite the decline in their sporting business. The much greater impact of bombing in this conflict meant that some makers went out of business for this reason. Blanch, for example, gave up their retail business as a result of war damage and a few others lost property or valuable records. When the war ended, the recovery from it was far slower and more difficult than it had been a quarter of a century earlier. As Britain's manufacturing industry rebuilt, it competed compellingly for the labour force that might otherwise have been content with modestly paid craft trades like gunmaking. Whilst the shooting fraternity had come through the first war feeling that their prosperity had been dented, they were far more strongly hit by the consequences of the second, and this in turn was very depressing on the market for guns. Nonetheless the front-line makers continued to make guns, but in more modest numbers than pre-war, and there was a gradual decline in the number of skilled men working in the trade. Many of the makers in London that had kept workshops making and repairing pre-war were gradually running these down as their skilled staff retired. Few of the smaller firms could meet the cost of training replacements, even if young people who wanted to work in the trade could be found.

When the writer Gough Thomas (G. T. Garwood) had a best gun made by Atkin just after the war, there was correspondence in which he was assured by the maker that the gun would be made to pre-war standards[20], a sure sign perhaps that these were felt to be at risk of slipping. Another significant impact came from the decline of the supporting trades in Birmingham which would never return to their pre-war production so that components became difficult to source for those trying to build new guns. These difficulties forced further rounds of closures and amalgamations in gunmaking firms. James Woodward is probably the most famous of the casualties in the immediately post war period, but others, like Hellis and later Atkin, both merged with Grant and Lang a decade or so later.

The trade kept going through the fifties and sixties despite the steady tightening in the supply of materials and skilled labour only to face a far bigger threat from the economic climate. Inflationary pressures, mainly driven by wages, had been growing throughout the sixties as had a progressive rise in taxation, bringing with it a decline in spending power. This was to lead to a serious recession in the early seventies which was to have a devastating impact on the whole of British industry. The gun trade had been slow to adapt its business practices, many of them being more rooted in the nineteenth century than the twentieth. It was consequently ill-equipped to deal with the turmoil that was coming.

In particular, the trade had not recognised the need to adapt to inflation. From the start of the breech loading era in 1860, when the cost of a best London gun was about £60, prices had risen slowly to reach about £120 in 1930 (for a much more complicated product), to about £375 in 1950 and to £650 in 1960. Through much of this period guns had been delivered usually within a year of being ordered, so gunmakers were in the habit of committing to a price at the time of order. The price of the best gun was to rise to £1500 by 1970, to £10,000 by 1980 and now (2017) stands close to £100,000. Furthermore, at the start of this price spiral, delivery times were moving out to 2-3 years or longer because of shortage of labour and materials. So many makers found themselves in financial difficulties at the end of the sixties, having committed to deliver guns at what turned out to be unrealistically low prices. They responded as best they could, some

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by imposing additional charges at the risk of the customer walking away and others by reducing quality, particularly of finish, which served to boost the attractiveness of older second-hand firearms at the expense of new production. This caused the second-hand market to boom and drew into the trade dealers who were making money by buying and selling but who had no capacity to make or repair guns.

There is a long list of casualties from this period, all of whom either closed entirely or abandoned their traditional business of making and selling guns from a showroom in the fashionable centres of the cities of London, Birmingham and Edinburgh. Jeffery and Rigby both of whom were more famous as rifle makers than gun makers, were bought out. Cogswell & Harrison closed its retail shop at about the same time, as did Thomas Bland a few years later. In Birmingham, Westley Richards, Greener, and ultimately Webley & Scott, all left the business as did many of the trade makers in that city, whose names were only seldom inscribed on the guns they made.

A poignant account of this period of decline can be found in Don Masters' two books on The House of Churchill[22] and Atkin, Grant & Lang[23], particularly in the latter. The tensions between shareholders, some of whom were gunmakers and others of whom were investing for amusement or for profit, is a recurrent theme in his story. The dramatic decline begins in the second half of the sixties, with the two firms eventually merging to become Churchill, Atkin Grant & Lang in 1971, only to cease trading entirely ten years later in 1980. With this collapse went not just the businesses referred to in the firm's title, but also the firms of Harrison & Hussey, Lancaster, Watson, Beesley, and Hellis, as well as the Birmingham maker Wright, all of whom had been subsumed in stages into this one business during the previous half century. Apart from describing the rapid final collapse, Masters' books also give pointers to the gradual decline which had been particularly relentless after the Second World War.

There is an important sequel to this tale of woe. The closures I have referred to above relate to the business operating as founded by the person whose name they bear. Almost all of these were skilled craftsmen who established their businesses by making or having made for them the guns and rifles that bore their name, and selling these directly to customers who came to their shops in the city centres, the firearms being made either on the premises, in workshops nearby or by outworkers. Once these businesses had closed in their original form, the right to use the trading names were sold on in many cases, often accompanied by some of the records, usually the register of firearms made. In some cases, these names have changed hands several times. Many of the current owners of these names, few of whom have any connection with the original firms, are still active in the gun trade. So many of the names mentioned above as having closed down are still those of active gun businesses, some of them making guns bearing the names of the original founder, but operating with no direct line of descent from the original business.

We have dealt in some detail with the businesses that closed during the century, so what of those that did not? Several traded continuously throughout the century without major disruption or discontinuity; James Purdey, Holland and Holland, Boss & Co and William Evans come to mind as having achieved this amongst the London makers. All went through a period of very difficult trading in the early seventies, with profits being low or non-existent for a year or two. Holland & Holland and James Purdey & Sons had both become limited companies in 1898 and 1925 respectively, and thereby passed out of the exclusive control of their founding families. Both continued predominantly as gunmakers in this form until the closing years of the century, whereupon the French fashion house Chanel took over Holland & Holland in 1990 and the Vendome Group did likewise to Purdey in 1994. In both cases these takeovers were accompanied by significant investment in modern machine tools to reduce costs by providing the craftsmen with component parts machined much closer to their final dimensions than had been possible

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previously. They also introduced far more in the way of fashion and lifestyle goods into the retail showrooms, spreading the significant costs of these facilities across a revenue base far bigger than that derived from just gun sales. Boss & Co had become a private limited company in 1930 and was to remain under the control of the Robertson family, who had bought the business from the founder's family in 1890, until 1999 when it was sold to a new owner, who in turn sold it again in 2002. They have now given up having a separate West End showroom and are operating from their factory. William Evans have traded for over 125 years from various addresses in the St James' Street area and continue to do so. For much of the 20th century they sold new and second-hand firearms, many of the former being made for them by the trade. They were taken over in the 1980s and now confine their production primarily to quality guns and rifles based on imported components and, like Purdey and Holland, have diversified into clothing and country goods sold from their London showroom and another at Bisley.

But there is one other gun making firm that traded through the century that has not been mentioned so far and that is the subject of this book. The firm of John Wilkes started the century as a privately owned gun and rifle maker trading from premises close to Regent Street, and it ended the century still trading as a privately owned business and run by the grandsons of the founder and trading from premises barely two hundred yards from where their grandfather had started in business 110 years previously. Although John Wilkes was a small business compared to the likes of Holland and Purdey, they sold over 3200 guns and rifles bearing their name over a period of 110 years, which ranged from trade guns of all qualities through to the very best that London could produce. Retail business was, however, only a small part of what they did; for most of the century they functioned mainly as a trade gunmaker doing work for other leading makers.

Fortunately, the complete records of their business covering the period between 1927 and 2003 survive, as do more fragmented accounts of the business from the time of its founding around 1890 to 1927. These records provide not just an explanation of the how Wilkes was able to survive and succeed when many around them were collapsing; they also paint a clear picture of how the trade operated outside the confines of the major makers. The likes of Purdey, Holland and Boss all had a great deal of capacity in house for much of the century, and although they all depended on the trade for some of their key supplies, they were much less dependent on the outwork arrangements that supported many of the smaller makers. The Wilkes family came from the Midlands, and throughout its existence, the firm of John Wilkes made extensive use of their contacts in Birmingham and sourced much of their supplies from there, to the point where other London makers would come to them to arrange for outwork to be done for them in that city.

The records give only part of the story. They are contained in about eighty handwritten ledgers, 140 invoice books with supporting documents, many of the former being leather bound and most of them being clear and legible. The other part on which I have drawn, which amplifies and gives life to what would otherwise have been a rather dry and very cryptic documentary record, is based on many hundreds of hours on conversations with John and Tom Wilkes. I never attempted to document these stories at the time of telling, to have done so would have been to have turned a spontaneous conversation into an interview, but I have I hope remembered the salient points of many of the stories they told me, and I have inserted these in the narrative as the story unfolds where they fit best. As will be seen, some of these relate to events that cannot easily be verified by other means.

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Inflation and Economics

Before beginning the story of John Wilkes as a business, it is necessary to set out a few of the basic issues around money and economics as they obtained during the period covered by the story. As might be expected from ledgers that were compiled to aid the running of the business, much of what is in them relates to money; costs of work done, of supplies, of wages paid, invoices raised and accounts paid. Much of this information comes from the period prior to the decimalisation of the British currency in February 1971, so money is recorded in the ledgers in pounds, and the now obsolete shillings and pence. There were 20 shillings to the pound and twelve pence to the shilling. I have chosen to report any monetary sums as recorded at the time rather than convert it to the current decimal currency; so an item costing two pounds, sixteen shillings and eleven pence, about £2.85 in modern currency, is written as £2/16/11. At a time when even a newspaper costs £1, this may seem academic, but in the 1930s, a great many of the component items of a gun had prices that were measured in shillings and pence rather than pounds.

There is also the issue of inflation. As has been mentioned earlier, overall retail prices in the British economy had been quite stable, rising very gradually through the Victorian era and on, with a few fluctuations into the twentieth century. Although prices roughly doubled in the First World War, they then fell back again in the twenties, so that in 1930 they were only 40% up on 1914 levels. They were then flat up to that start of the Second World War, during which they doubled. After the War they rose steadily for 25 years, but then shot upwards in the 70s and early 80s before settling down to increase slightly more modestly for the remainder of the century. It is tempting when reviewing the fortunes of the John Wilkes business, which traded through periods of both high and low inflation, to try to normalise the monetary sums encountered at different times in the story to allow some comparability. Although indices exist for various economic parameters such as prices, wages, the value of gold etc, these do not advance in step with one another. To illustrate this, I have looked at a comparison between the 1930s, a period that our story will cover in some detail and a recent date, 2013, a period for which prices are easily available.

To start with a familiar and rather dramatic example; in 1930 the price of a best London gun was between £100 and £130 depending on the maker, and a 1000 12 bore cartridges were between £7 and £9 retail. In 2013, the best gun was priced between £50,000 and £60,000, about 500 times the 1930 price, whereas 1000 cartridges cost about 30 times the price of 80 years ago. Put another way, had cartridge prices inflated in line with guns, a box of 25 cartridges would cost £100. In this same period, average UK retail prices have increased by a factor of 43, and average UK earnings by a factor of 173. In 1930 very few master gunmakers were earning more than £5 per week. There are so few now that it is hard to set a level, but it is plausible to generalise that their modern counterparts today would expect to earn between 100 and 300 times the wages of their 1930 predecessors. This trend of higher than average labour cost inflation in the gun trade is particularly striking for engraving, a skill whose status as an art form went unrecognised and unrewarded until well after the war. A best sidelock could be fully engraved with standard rose and scroll or medium scroll engraving for between £3/10/0 and £4/10/0 in the 1930s; prices today are approaching 1000 times higher than this. With more elaborate forms of engraving such comparisons become very subjective because of the individuality of the work, but prices today appear to be 2000 to 3000 times higher than in 1930.

There are many underlying reasons for this unevenness in price inflation. Cartridge manufacture for example has been very amenable to mass production and the volumes used by clay shooting have allowed the costs of this automation to be widely spread, so cartridges are cheaper by about

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50% relative to general retail prices today than they were in the 1930s. Guns on the other hand have a high proportion of skilled labour in their cost build up and this was undervalued in the 1930s – partly because there were more than enough trained people for the demand, but also because the social climate was one in which highly skilled people expected no more than a barely comfortable living wage. Furthermore, production volumes are lower, so those makers still having to cover the much-inflated costs of central London shops in the price of their guns have fewer guns amongst which to divide these fixed costs than was the case 80 years ago. The introduction of very advanced and very expensive machine tools into the trade is an important factor in the cost equation today that was an insignificant cost in the 1930s, when typically machining was under 5% of the manufacturing cost of a best gun – the rest of the work being done by hand. Factoring in all these different cost drivers has meant that gun prices have advanced about ten times faster than overall retail prices.

All this detail about inflation is a preamble to saying that in telling the story of John Wilkes, I have decided that I will record any sums of money in "money of the day" and not make any attempt to correct for inflation. In doing so, I will be following the practice adopted in other gun makers' histories that cover the period. I will try as often as possible to tie these sums to other contemporary costs, to help to keep a perspective on the relative prices of the various elements that went in to making and selling guns and rifles.

From time to time I have also used prices realised at auction. Until the early 1970s auction houses reflected the fact that their role is that of agent of the vendor by charging all of their commission to that party. The buyer therefore paid the hammer price. This was sometimes complicated by the houses who ran the bidding in the obsolete guinea (£1/1/0 or £1.05 in modern currency) resulting in some occasionally odd looking hammer prices when converted. After the decimalisation of the currency there was a widely-adopted change in auction practice where auctioneers spread (and also substantially increased) the commission they charged between buyer and seller by adding a buyer's premium to the hammer price. Initially this was 10% but now has risen to 20 - 25%. An item bought at auction today therefore costs the buyer significantly more than the hammer price. All of the auction prices that are reported in this book are hammer prices and therefore understate the amount paid for the lot in any auction since the early 1970s by the amount of the premium at the time.

A Generation of Craftsmen

As the story unfolds, we will encounter illustrations, touched on above, of the relatively low wages that were paid to master craftsmen. We will single out the largely unrecognised skill of some of those that had dealings with John Wilkes, many of whose work survives on guns still in use today. The work of these men is every bit as remarkable as that of the engravers of the period, two of whom, Henry Kell and John Sumner, have received much entirely deserved posthumous acclaim for their work. The other trades; the actioners, barrel filers, stockers, lock and furniture makers and many others, deserve to have some of their past masters given the same acclaim that only recently has been bestowed on the engravers. Their work often lacks the immediate recognition and visual appeal of engraving, but it matters far more to the primary purpose of a gun or rifle, unless of course it is one that has been bought solely as an ornament.

We will come back again and again to a generation of craftsmen that were born between 1870 and 1890, all of whom would have been fully trained by 1900 or very shortly thereafter. They were taught their skills in the Victorian era when the great majority of gunmaking work was still done using hand tools – the treadle lathe being about the most sophisticated piece of machinery they would use regularly. Most were either too old or too valuable to the war economy to serve

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in the trenches of the First World War. These were the craftsmen who contributed to making Wilkes's guns in the 1920s and 30s, the period for which we have the most complete records, but they also made for many of the other London makers during this exceptional period.

In finding out about these men we will often be confronted by incomplete information. Much research derived from trade directories has been published on those that contributed to the various stages of making a gun or rifle, but whose names never appeared on the finished product. Some managed to get their initials or trade mark stamp in some concealed place on the end product, but many went entirely unrecorded and unrecognised. James Woodward even went to the trouble of filing out, or over-striking with their own stamps, any maker's marks they encountered on the components they used. Brown's three volumes[7,8,9] contain a most exhaustive list of firms and individuals extracted from trade directories of the last two centuries, and other books such as that by Douglas Tate[24] on Birmingham Gunmakers have drawn on these same original sources.

I have made extensive use of their research but entries in trade directories have a limitation. To be recorded in a directory often requires the subject to believe that enough new business will flow from others coming across the entry to justify any cost of inserting it. With a trade based on individual craftsmen working often in single rooms, often in residential properties, their whole survival depended on them being known to and trusted by those that sent work to them. A directory entry was unlikely to make much of a difference in these close-knit communities. So I have often encountered craftsmen referred to in the records for whom I can find no corresponding business address in the directory based sources. The availability of census information for the period from 1841 to 1911 has helped to solve a few of these riddles. The census returns give information about where people lived, their ages and family relationship to others at the address, their occupation and whether they were an employer or employee. As gun making trades were usually passed down within families, this information can shed some light on which of several businesses recorded under the same surname were connected by family ties. On those occasions where a family lives and trades at the same address, and that address is in a directory, this allows families and businesses to be connected with confidence. Even with this help I have found there are nearly always pieces of the jigsaw still missing.

A complicating factor which we will encounter from time to time is that it was common in the trade for fathers and sons to be known by the same name. In some cases they had exactly the same name, James Dalziel Dougall father and son were so blessed; in other cases there were small differences, John Wilkes fathered John William Wilkes (known as Jack) and he in turn fathered John William Harrison Wilkes (known as John). Finally, there were those that were referred to by the same name even if they had a completely different one. The barrel filer Harry Wheeler's brother and later his nephew, who succeeded in turn to his business when Harry died young, were both referred to in the trade as Harry even though they were both called John. The census data and that derived from registry offices helps in untangling this, but again not always without ambiguity.

Having set the scene briefly for the period in which the Wilkes family made guns and rifles in London, we can now begin to tell the story of the family firm itself. The businesses records are the richest source for this, but they are not complete. For some periods, notably that from 1927 through to 1970 it will be possible to go into great detail, in some cases tracing all the workmen that contributed to a particular gun. For the period before and after that, where the records are sparser and in some cases absent altogether, the story will be more abridged.

Conversations with the John and Tom Wilkes, especially with John, the main source of anecdotes about the firm's history, were usually vague on the topic of who made Wilkes guns and rifles in

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the 45 years between 1895 and 1940, the period in during which the great majority of the guns and rifles that bear the name were produced. John usually gave an account designed to appeal to potential customers of the firm. For the first 30 of those years the firm had premises and a business in Birmingham, in which respect it enjoyed an advantage over many other London makers who sourced some of their production from that city. John's anecdotes about the firm led one to believe that the Wilkes guns that were made in Birmingham, which were over 80% of their production in this period, originated from the Birmingham end of the business. For a period of about five years immediately after the First World War, Wilkes did indeed make their own guns in Birmingham. Before and after this interlude the evidence points to Wilkes buying in completed or partially completed guns from various members of the Birmingham trade, selling these alongside the smaller number of guns made wholly or in part in London. Their history in the city may well have given them preferential services from the city's gunmaking community, but the documentary evidence is at odds with John's anecdotes on this topic. On this issue and one or two others where the documents support a turn of events that conflict with firm's anecdotal history, I have favoured the version supported by documents, but I have made mention of these occasional discrepancies where they are encountered in the narrative.

Some new light has recently been cast on the workings of the Birmingham trade in particular by the recent publication of two volumes of notes from interviews conducted by Bernard Hinchley[20,21] with some of the leading craftsmen still at work there in the period between 1948 and 1952. The notes of these interviews are handwritten and cryptic and the conversations sometimes ramble over a variety of topics, but they cover not just the way the trade in and around the city worked at the time, but also the recollections of the interviewees going back well beyond the turn of the century.

I am sure I am not alone in having enjoyed enormously the many stories recounted by John and Tom Wilkes, indeed without them to lighten and give depth to the narrative, I don't think I would have been able to tell this story of their family firm. In writing this book, I hope I am striking the right balance between recording the factual history of a small but quite unique contributor to England's gunmaking heritage in the twentieth century, and preserving for posterity some of the handed down stories about just a few of the craftsmen whose extraordinary skill made it all possible.

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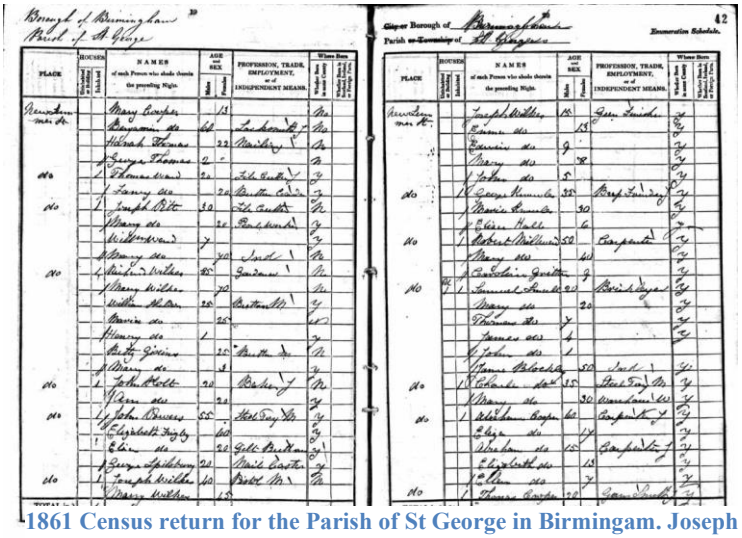
Chapter 2 – Family History 1820 to 1896

A Birmingham Flintlock Pistol Maker

The name of Wilkes was a common one in the Midlands in the mid-nineteenth century. It is one that is often encountered in the gun trade in Birmingham and also that in Yorkshire in this period. Nigel Brown[7,8] lists 20 different firms and sole traders bearing the names of Wilkes or Wilks. Whilst one or two of these may be reincarnations of the same business, the remainder are probably separate entities. It would be a truly daunting task to establish the extent to which any of the owners of these firms were related. The practice of sons following fathers into the same trade, often being given the same first name, makes it certain that some of them were. Gunmakers with the name were also to be found in London; there were one or more Wilkes on Purdey's payroll[16] from about 1890 continuously to the 1950s.

The family believed that the firm was started by the great grandfather of the last owners of the business around 1830; all of the firm's stationery in recent use quoting this date. This was Joseph Wilkes who according to the 1851 census was born in Birmingham around 1825. This makes it impossible for him to have been in business as early as 1830. If there was a Wilkes business in existence at this time, it must have been run by an earlier generation of the family or perhaps another branch.

There was indeed an earlier generation. The 1841 census shows the Joseph Wilkes referred to above, described as a gun finisher at that time even though he was only 15, living with his parents at an address in New Summer Street in the parish of St George Hundred in Birmingham. His father, the head of the household, was another Joseph Wilkes, who lived with his wife Mary and five children, of whom Joseph was the oldest. Joseph senior, who was the great, great grandfather of the last owners of the business, was born around 1799 in Darlaston, Staffordshire, and described himself in 1841 as a pistol maker. Darlaston lies about ten miles north west of Birmingham. Of the remaining four children, then aged between 13 and 5, it is the youngest, named John that will also be of interest, alongside his older brother Joseph, in the story of the John Wilkes business.



1861 Census return for the Parish of St George in Birmingam. Joseph Wilkes' family are at the bottom of the first page and top of the second

To return to Joseph Wilkes senior, it is interesting to note that with his birth in 1799, John Wilkes can claim a lineage in the trade that goes back only a decade or so short of that of Purdey, Lancaster, Greener and Westley Richards, with only Rigby, Boss and Cogswell having their origins earlier, in the second half of the 18th century. It is reasonable to suppose that Joseph Wilkes senior would have been working as a fully qualified pistol maker by 1820, at which time flintlocks would have been the only mechanism available. By the time of the 1841 census he would in all probability

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have been making percussion muzzle loaders, but by the 1851 census he describes himself as a Revolving Pistol Maker, living at Summer Lane. Living in the same neighbourhood was the famous revolver maker William Tranter, who at the time was embarking on a period of extraordinary inventiveness, patenting numerous advances to the design of revolvers and other military weapons between 1850 and 1880. As we shall see, Joseph junior by 1851 was in London, but his younger brother John, by then 15 was also a Revolving Pistol Maker and still living with his father.

Brown[8] reports a J. Wilkes trading as a gun, rifle, pistol and revolver maker at 272 Summer Lane in 1838 which may have been Joseph senior. The earliest trade records for either John or Joseph Wilkes are 1846 when he lists a Joseph Wilkes at Court 4, New Summer Street, Birmingham from 1846 to 1854. Given that this was close to or the same address as on Joseph Wilkes senior's 1841 census return, this must have been his pistol making business. These addresses and those that they moved to later are all about a mile north of the St Mary's area in Birmingham where the gun industry in the city was gradually concentrating.

Moving to London

By the late 1840s, Joseph Wilkes junior was married to Anna, a waistcoat maker from Liverpool, and by the time of the 1851 census they had a son, another Joseph, born around 1849, a daughter Emma born in 1850 and a son Thomas born in 1851. Joseph junior and his family appear to have been living in London for a while by 1851 as all of the children were born there. On the night of the census in 1851, the 30th March, the whole of the Joseph junior's family are recorded as visitors in the home of Thomas Montgomery, a watch finisher who lived at 49 Mary St, Shoreditch, just north of the City of London. Situated to the west of Shoreditch itself, parts of which were quite run down, Mary Street is now in a very fashionable area of Islington. It, and the wide streets around it, have neat terraces of artisan's houses spaciously laid out, their frontages well preserved. Thomas Montgomery was born in Dublin, 61 years old and married to Ellen who was from Liverpool. The Montgomerys were Anna's parents. Thomas Montgomery was to be an important enough figure in the lives of the Wilkes children for one of Joseph Wilkes junior's grandsons to be named after him.

Ten years later at the time of the 1861 census Joseph Wilkes senior was living at Alma Place in Aston, along with his wife and just one of his children, a widowed first daughter then aged 28. He described himself as a Pistol Filer. Son John was married to Frances, the same age as him, 26, and described himself as a "Breech Loading Gun Maker employing 2 boys" and also living in Aston, in Walsall Road. Brown[8] reports the Joseph Wilkes business at Colmore Place in Birmingham between 1855 and 1858 and then at Alma Street, Aston New Town, in around 1859. Separately there was a John Wilkes business, described as an Action, Gun and Pistol Maker, also at Alma Street in Aston between 1859 and 1870, suggesting that by then father Joseph and son John had joined forces.

At the same time in London, Joseph Wilkes junior and the family were living about 2 miles away from the Montgomery's address, and east of the City in Whitechapel at 12 Court Street, which today is a short, decrepit thoroughfare connecting the Whitechapel Road with Whitechapel tube station. They were the sole occupants of the house which in the 1860s would have been dominated by the proximity of the railway. Ann, as she was recorded, appears to have given up work, whilst Joseph was still a gunmaker. Three further children had joined the family, Amy born in 1854, John, around whom our story will soon revolve, in 1855, and Ellen born in 1860, all of these three also being shown as born in London.

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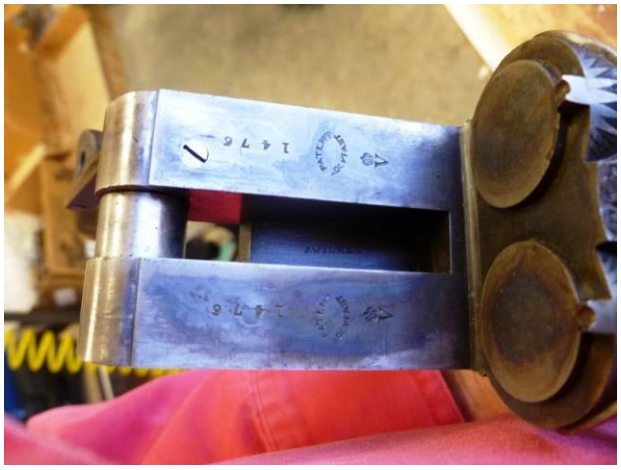
It would seem that even at this early stage the Wilkes business was not confined to Birmingham, although there are no pointers as to why Joseph Wilkes junior would have needed to spend so much time in London as to be domiciled there or as to what connection he would have retained with the Birmingham trade. A few years earlier mobility between the two centres would have been quite restricted, but the opening of the interconnecting railway in 1838 would have made this easier. We do not know if he was in business on his own account in London or was working in partnership with either or both of his father and brother in Birmingham. Brown makes no mention of him appearing in London trade directories. He may have been an outworker or employed in the London trade – craftsmen so employed are often not recorded in directories; or he may have been spending some of his time selling Birmingham made components or complete guns and rifles to the London trade, perhaps even proving and finishing them in London. Whatever the reason, the ability of the Wilkes family to move between the two main centres of the gun trade in England was to be a feature of their business throughout its existence and was to be a source of competitive advantage to them in the twentieth century.

We also have few clues as to what the Wilkes gunmaking business produced in this period. Few guns bearing the Wilkes name survive from this period of transition from muzzle to breech loader, suggesting that most of those they made would have been finished bearing other names than theirs. By describing himself in 1861 as a breech loading action maker, John Wilkes in Birmingham was clearly positioning himself at the forefront of the new trend. But the Birmingham trade at the time was also the main centre for military weapon production, as well as having an enormous export business of utility guns and rifles to the Empire and beyond, so they may have had several different target markets.

There was a good single barrel percussion muzzle loading pigeon gun, with no provision for a ramrod, in the front shop at Beak Street, that dated from the period from between 1850 to 1865, and which bore just the inscription “Wilkes” on locks and barrel. This could well have been an example of Joseph the younger or John Wilkes’ work, but might also have come from another of the gunmaking firms that bore the Wilkes name.



Lockfast pinfire 10 Bore retailed by Jeffery of Guildford showing the Wilkes stamp in the base of the action slot.

A more unexpected clue comes from an early 10 bore pinfire breech loading gun, numbered 1476, that bears the name of Richard Jeffery of Guildford. This well preserved and high quality gun was recently acquired by a collector in the United States. It is built on Dougall’s patent Lockfast action and dates from the 1860s, probably from the earlier years of that decade. The quality and style suggests it was built and finished in Dougall’s factory, and merely retailed by Jeffery. Stamped in the base of the action slot is the actioner’s name, “J.WILKES”. Again there is ambiguity as to whether this refers to Joseph in London or the Birmingham based John, but in this case the stamp itself survived, as well over a century later it was still in the Wilkes workshop in Soho, so the association of this action with one or other branch of the Wilkes family business is certain.

As we shall see, a decade or more later, the connection of the Wilkes family with Dougall’s business was to become far stronger than just making actions.

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The American Civil War

The development of the Birmingham trade and in particular the way in which it adopted machinery is well covered by Williams[25]. In this book, the impact of the American Civil War between 1861 and 1865 on the Birmingham trade is described. Having, along with the London ordnance factories, a monopoly of military small arms production in Britain, the trade was well used to the trend that prices and prosperity went up in times of conflict. This had happened in the Napoleonic Wars and again in the Crimean War, but the American Civil War was to have an impact of greater proportion. Both sides in the war had an insatiable appetite for infantry small arms which outstripped the considerable and well developed capability of American industry to deliver. Over a million weapons were shipped from Britain to both sides in the conflict in the four year of its duration, two thirds of which were made in Birmingham. Several times this amount was manufactured in the States in the same period. For a short while the Birmingham trade was absurdly prosperous, some of the tradesmen managing to earn from £20 to £50 per week, 10 to 20 times their normal earnings and a level of remuneration that would be equivalent today to that of Premier League footballers! Whilst very few of them spent this money wisely, it must have come as a shock to all when the war ended in 1865 and the prosperity disappeared as suddenly as it had begun.

The Civil War was to have another much longer term effect on the trade by spurring the Americans into inventing and developing machinery for the mass production of military weapons. This was already under development in the first half of the 19th century, but the need to mass produce in ever greater numbers was to have a far-reaching effect on the manufacture of military small arms, resulting in a complete revolution in methods during the century. The use of machinery was more selectively and more slowly adopted in the manufacture of sporting firearms, and this brought about a gradual separation between military manufacture, which moved to larger and larger industrial complexes in which the need for volume production and the full interchangeability of parts could be realised, and sporting manufacture, which tended to remain largely dependent on hand work and the need for individuality of the end product, and which remained in the hands of small firms. It would be years before the adoption of machinery would have much impact on the way sporting firearms were made, indeed it was to take to near the end of the 20th century before this happened at the premium end of the London trade.

Desertion

I have described the impact of the American Civil war on the trade because our story of the Wilkes business now takes a dramatic turn. Sometime after the Civil War had ended, Joseph Wilkes junior, at the age of about 40, and with a wife and six children aged between 5 and 17 to support, decided to secretly liquidate as many of his assets as possible and to leave the country with the money so realised bound for the United States, abandoning family and business in the process. He left sometime between 1865 and 1870 and certainly before the 1871 census. We can only speculate why he did this, possibly a mid-life crisis, possibly to chase the prosperity that had briefly flooded into Birmingham from America only to recede again. In 1865 his son John, the future founder of the London business, was just 10. Father Joseph senior would then have been 66 and brother John about 30.

The story passed down in the Wilkes family is that the oldest two sons, Joseph and Thomas travelled to the US to find their father, and although they managed to pick up some information as to his whereabouts, they never caught up with him. Thomas did not return to England, emigrating and taking up employment in the States, whereas Joseph did return and took up employment as gunmaker, but outside the family business.

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US census records show a consistent but slightly different and more revealing story. In 1870 a Joseph Wilkes, reporting himself as aged 42, was trading as a gunsmith in Hartford, Connecticut, living with a Mary Wilkes, aged 41 and a younger Joseph Wilkes aged 14, the whole family born in England and retaining their nationality. In view of a two-year age discrepancy for Joseph himself, it is not absolutely certain this is the same individual, but is highly likely that it is. The son Joseph that was born in London in 1849 would then have been 21, so it is unlikely that he is the person in the census return. It is certainly possible that Joseph ran off to the US with Mary and a child to set up home there; it would after all be a good motive for the manner of his departure. By 1880 the same Joseph is still in Hartford trading as a partly employed gunsmith but by then living with an Elizabeth Wilkes, fourteen years his younger. Here the trail of Joseph Wilkes, the black sheep of the family, goes cold.

Joseph's son Thomas appears in the record as a labourer in Chicago in 1880. His birth date matches UK records and the US census shows he arrived in the US in 1873 and married Jane, also from England, two years later. In all they had ten children of whom six survived infancy. By 1900 the family was living in Bridgeport, Connecticut and in 1910 they are still recorded in the same area, Thomas by then having broadened out from the gun trade to describe himself as a filer. It seems more than likely that this individual was the Thomas Wilkes from Joseph's family that emigrated to the US. He appears to have lived in and around Bridgeport for the remainder of his life, dying there in the 1920s.

Despite this drama surrounding Joseph Wilkes and his two eldest sons, these members of the family will have no further part to play in the story that follows. The manner of his departure meant that future generations of the Wilkes family in England would speak of Joseph only with contempt.

Prosperity in Birmingham,

The impact on the remaining family and on Joseph junior's deserted business was clearly enormous, but the extent to which his removal of assets impacted his father and brother is less clear. Joseph senior carried on in business and by 1871 was still working as a Pistol Maker at the age of 73, and his wife Mary appears to have returned to work as a burnisher although by then she was 78 years old. They were still living as the only occupants of Back Alma Place in Aston. Mary died in 1872 at 79, and Joseph in 1879 at the age of 80.

Nigel Brown[8] lists two further records of a Joseph Wilkes business, a gun and pistol maker at 1 Lench Street in Birmingham from 1860 – 72 and at Lower Loveday St in 1886. Both these addresses are in the St Mary's area, and I have been unable to find any link between our Joseph Wilkes and these addresses, so they may indeed have been run by another Wilkes family, possibly, as Brown suggests, the family that was based in Leeds.

By contrast to his father, the elder John seems to have prospered. By 1871 and then 35, he was still living in Walsall Road in Aston, and described himself as a "Master Gunmaker employing 3 men and 2 boys" with two young sons and two domestic servants resident in his house. John seems to have escaped any impact on his prosperity of his brother's departure. By 1881, he had moved to 24 High Street in Aston, his wife Frances was now described as a Milliner, they had one domestic servant and John described himself as a Gun Action Maker. Ten years later John and Frances Wilkes had moved to 65 Westminster Road in Handsworth – then a middle class residential area a few miles west of St Mary's, and John now described himself as "Living on his own means". The elder son, John James, by then 24, had no occupation declared but the younger son was now a Jeweller. Ten years later still in 1901, John's wife had died; he and his two sons

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were at the same address, with one domestic servant. John now described himself as a Gun Maker working on his own account. Albert, the son who was previously a jeweller was now a merchant's clerk, and John James still had no profession. By the 1911 census, John is still living at the same address as a retired gunmaker, with a housekeeper and son Albert. The older son John James is living separately, married and shown as being a Night Fireman. John senior died at the age of almost 80 in January 1916, still living at 65 Westminster Road and leaving a sizeable estate of £6,210. Son Albert and gun action maker John R Baker were his executors. With his death, the connection of this branch of the family with the gun trade ended.

Nigel Brown's extracts from trade directories fits well with this. Around 1870 the John Wilkes business, now described as an Action Maker, moved to 24 High St in Aston, the address where John Wilkes also lived. There was a move to the back of the building around 1900, but it remained recorded at the address up to 1916, even though its proprietor had by then retired. By the time its owner died, there was, as we shall see, another member of the family, also a John Wilkes, with an active interest in carrying the business on.

Rebuilding

Our story now takes us back to the abandoned family of Joseph Wilkes junior, living in Whitechapel. Regrettably, I have not been able to find an unambiguous return for this family in the 1871 census or for any of them individually. There is an entry for an Ann Wilks (*sic*) living with two daughters at a sister-in-law's address in Whitechapel, but there are several inconsistencies, so if these were Joseph Wilkes' family, someone made a very careless return. There is no record at all of the sons Joseph, Thomas or John. It is possible that in 1871 the older two were on their trip to America, and John as an apprentice may just have been overlooked in the census.

The next entry where some of them appear as a family is in 1881. By this time, Ann Wilkes is 60 years old, head of the household and a tailoress, and living at 108 Ben Jonson Road, between Limehouse and Stepney Green in East London. This is under a mile east of the address in Court Street that the family occupied 20 years earlier. Daughters Amy and Ellen, now 25 and 20 respectively, are both also tailoresses and living at home, as is son John, now aged 24 and a gunmaker.

Here we rely on the history passed down in the Wilkes family which recounts that the young John had gone to Birmingham in the immediate aftermath of his father's desertion and had learned there the gunmaking trade. His uncle John was beginning to prosper around this time, and it is more than likely that John served his apprenticeship either to his uncle or, possibly, under some arrangement made by him. He could well have been one of the "two boys" of the 1871 census return. We know that the young John returned to London fully qualified, and in order to fit in the sequence of events that were to happen next in his professional development, it is likely that he came back to London when he was about 20 years old, in 1875 or thereabouts.

London Line

The London and Birmingham trades were very different in focus and culture in 1870, having only emerged from a period of outright rivalry within the living memory of some of those then working. By this time the two centres were mutually dependent. Birmingham needed London as a marketplace for its guns and rifles – Greener, Westley Richards and Webley & Scott all had established retail outlets there during the second half of the 19th century; and London needed Birmingham to supply everything from small components, through major parts, such as locks, furniture and barrel tubes, to complete guns and rifles. But the differences of old meant that in

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the hammer gun era there was a distinct difference in the style of the firearms produced in the two cities. They were even cased differently; London makers usually placing guns in their cases with their right side uppermost and Birmingham makers with the left. Each of the makers in turn had their own house styles so that, with a bit of practice and from the other side of a room, you could tell a Boss, from a Grant, from a Woodward, from a Lancaster from a Purdey. And you could do the same with a Greener, a Westley Richards and a Powell. But the London guns had something quite intangible in common with one another, as did the Birmingham guns; characteristics that were not shared between the centres. The London makers all had workmen that moved at times between them, as did the Birmingham ones, and it was probably this movement of labour that produced this uniformity of style. In London this was known as London Line, and to make to it was sufficiently a tangible skill for the young John Wilkes to seek his first job in London with the particular objective of learning how to make to it. To achieve this, he went to work for E.C.Hodges, probably around 1875.

Edwin Charles Hodges

Edwin Charles Hodges was born in 1831, and completed his apprenticeship as a gunmaker to his uncle Ebenezer in 1852. This was the year after early drop down breech loaders had first appeared in England at the Great Exhibition, and the young Hodges set up in business immediately on completing his apprenticeship to concentrate on making breechloading actions.

Hodges must have made actions for the early experimenters with breech loading in the mid-1850s. By 1858 he was sufficiently established in the trade to be asked to action Boss's first breech loader. The change to breech loading guns was very rapid. Only two years after the first example was made, Boss produced in 1860[14] more breech loaders than muzzle loaders. Purdey achieved the same milestone that year for guns and in 1862 for rifles[16]. Hodges was well placed in a market that was booming. He consolidated his position as a principal actioner for Boss and also worked for others such as Lang, Blanch, Parker Field, Alfred Lancaster and Reilly. His actions of this period were all pinfires, which were initially single bite underlever but probably moved to the enduring Jones underlever when it was no longer covered by patent protection in 1862. They were of superb quality and had a distinctive style. The Jones underlever was to become an action that Hodges was to make for well over ten years, initially largely for Boss but, when their managing partner, Stephen Grant, left to set up on his own in 1867, Hodges went on to action most of his best guns.

In 1866, with centre fire rapidly overtaking pinfire, the original method of extracting a fired pinfire case, by pulling it out by the pin sleeve, was no longer possible. Hodges patented an extractor mechanism for centre fire cases that used two cams to lift the extractor that was inlet between the barrels and lifted the rim of the cartridge case. One of these cams was in the fore-end, and the other at the front of the lump on the barrels. This approach produced an exceptionally high lift to the extractor to facilitate removal of the fired cases. It is likely that at this time Hodges and his men would have started with a pair of filed barrels with breech ends unfinished. They would have made up the action, cut and finished the lumps, jointed the barrels into the action, made up and fitted the underlever and crosspin, made up and fitted the fore end iron, cut out the extractor recess, drilled the hole for the leg and fitted the extractor, and probably have made up and fitted the furniture (triggerplate, guard and triggers) to the action, because the lever and the guard had to be of matching shape. They would then have fitted the firing pins and submitted the action to proof, before returning it to the maker whose name it would bear, who would stock it, fit the locks and finish it.

The Jones underlever guns and rifles that Grant made in the late 1860s and early 1870s, which were mostly fitted with back action locks, give a pointer to the uniformity and quality of Hodges work of the period. They are all remarkably similar in dimensions and design, although there were small evolutionary changes in detail made as time progressed. A pair of these, 16 bores that were

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ordered by Queen Victoria as a present for the Prince of Wales in 1870, recently came up at auction. As royal guns they may have been expected to be different from the standard product, but they were much the same. They had slightly better engraving than the standard gun, large gold rather than small silver ovals in the stocks and a small extra bead filed round the fences, but otherwise they were exactly the same gun that Grant sold to all his other customers, barrelled by Harry Wheeler and actioned by Edwin Hodges.

The early breechloading actions, of which the Jones under lever was the most successful, all required the shooter to both close the barrels and then to bolt the action. Quite early on some makers had designed actions where the bolting mechanism snapped into place as the barrels were closed to make loading the gun quicker and easier. Although some makers patented and promoted these snap actions in the 1860s, many best makers were still using the rotary underlever well into the 1870s, particularly on actions where strength was required. But by the early years of the decade the trend towards snap actions was established. By far the most successful of the early snap actions was the Purdey under bolt but, whilst this remained protected by patent, Purdey's competitors in the London trade were looking for alternatives.

The Purdey bolt was the locking mechanism for their second pattern thumbhole under lever guns, and of most side by side guns ever since. This bolt operates in two bites, one in the back edge of each of the two barrel lumps. It is sometimes referred to as a double bolt, which implies there are two bearing surfaces to hold the barrels closed. This is misleading. The rear bite is the bearing surface that locks the barrels to the action. The forward bite of the Purdey bolt serves as a latching mechanism, the back face of the front lump holding the bolt open until the barrels are almost closed, at which point the forward edge of the bolt clears the forward slot and the bolt is then free to move forward under pressure from the lever spring. As it does so the rear bolt bears on the tapering surface of the rear bite, pulling the barrels shut under the impetus provided by the spring. The forward part of the bolt then fits into the slot in the forward lump, but is only a running fit; it does not contribute to holding the gun tightly shut.

For the leading makers, using an action that was the patent of a competitor had some attractions, the patentee could usually at least provide the blanks for the component parts, if not completely made up actions, but it had the disadvantage of doing little to help the maker who was putting his name on the action to establish their credentials at the forefront of the new breach loading technology. Furthermore, the patentee would charge a fee that would reduce margins.

With his barrel bolting patent of 1871, Hodges made his contribution to these developments. Grant chose to use this action on his snap action guns, and on these the engraved legend states that the patent is Grant's, but it was in fact Hodges' alone. They must have had a close commercial relationship. It is most usually encountered as a side lever, although the lever could also be a push forward mechanism under the guard. Its main merit from a patent perspective is that it was mechanically different from the Purdey bolt. Instead it used a single rear bolt of complex form that engaged a slot in the rear lump and which also had two round lateral extensions that ran in holes along the action bar. These engaged in two further bites formed by a crosspiece let through

A Grant side lever snap action gun built by Hodges under the 1871 patent

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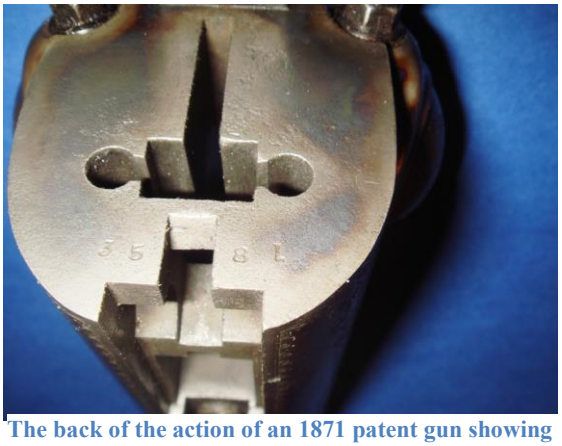
the rear lump that extended into two vertical slots cut in the sides of the main slot in the action bar. It is doubtful if these two extra bites contributed much to holding the gun shut, nor did they provide a latching mechanism to hold the bolt back whilst the gun was open. This was provided by a cam let vertically into the middle of the rear lump which engaged a corresponding vertical extension to bolt. It also had a rather complex extractor that operated on a cam hinged in the forward lump activated by two more slots cut vertically in the action bar on either side of the lump. These features all combined to produce a rather over-complicated action, but one which nevertheless was to stay in production for about ten years and which was used for about 1000 actions, all of which were made by Hodges but not all were supplied to Grant. The action is sometimes encountered on guns by other best makers, and Hodges also started to offer it on guns made up bearing his own name. Grant appears to have stopped using Hodges as an actioner around 1880, by which time he was offering hammerless actions patented by others which used the Purdey bolt.

The over complicated bolt of the 1871 patent action



The back of the action of an 1871 patent gun showing Hodges number 3581. Note the precision of the various slots and cut outs.

The Hodges business was to continue as one of the power houses of the London trade working behind the scenes as a specialist actioner. A few more patents were to follow although none that were to enjoy enormous commercial success. Although he continued to action guns for many makers the business became increasingly involved with that of Henry Atkin, the Hodges family eventually taking over the running of the business about five years after Atkin's death in 1907. Others followed in Wilkes' footsteps in using Hodges' factory to gain experience in their early years. Most celebrated of these was Ernest Lawrence who was apprenticed to Hodges in 1886, before moving on first to Woodward and then to Purdey where he was to be factory manager for many years, his descendants playing pivotal roles in the Purdey business throughout the 20th century. Hodges himself lived until 1925, well into his nineties, his children and grandchildren ensuring that the family's connection with the gun trade would span four generations.

Making the Early Breech Loaders

Comparing the percussion muzzle loaders of the day with the early breechloaders, many of the main component parts that gunmakers had to make were quite similar. The barrels, which had been more than half of the work in the gun with a muzzle loader, now needed chambers and lumps attached underneath instead of the hutts threaded in to the breech end. The stocking was a little different and more demanding in terms of the soundness of the attachment to the head of a now shorter stock, and a fore-end had to be made, but this was not greatly different from the forepart of the muzzle loader. Locks, cocks and furniture were little changed. It was the making of the action, so much more complicated than the detonating of the muzzle loader that it replaced, and the fitting of that action to the barrels that was an entirely new skill. It was this skill that the young Hodges set out to master.

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There were several early designs of drop down breech actions, but they all had one point in common, they had substantial slots and complicated cut outs that needed to be square and true to make the moving joint between the action and the barrels. Contrast this to the detonating of a breech loader which required little more than a file to make up from a forging. Mastering the art of designing the forging patterns for these early breech loaders and then making all the tooling necessary to convert the oversize block of blackened iron from the forge into a finished action must have been a daunting task.

Some 140 years later, I can remember a customer of Wilkes, who had wandered upstairs in Beak Street, talking at John whilst he tried to get on with some fiddly little job, about the latest alterations that a mutual acquaintance was making to the NC programme for machining complete U&O actions. To the side and above John's bench was a row of hooks on each of which hung a gun stock and action. Trying to bring a conversation in which he had little immediate interest to a close, John took down from its hook a Lancaster patent slide and drop hammer gun dating from around 1860. The Lancaster action had one of the most complex shaped action bodies of all the early breechloaders; it was after all the most expensive gun in London in its day. The customer was invited to take a good look at the Lancaster, and to reflect that its action had been cut out of a block of iron with a hammer and chisel; whereupon the conversation ended, the customer not apparently seeing any clear connection between this point and the one he wanted to talk about. But in the early 1850s, Mr Hodges' challenge was to work out how to do this, reliably, accurately and repetitively.

Action forging for a bar action hammer gun

He would have had at his disposal in the gun trade of the day only hand tools, with the probable exception of a treadle lathe, which had been made by several firms, notably that of Holtzapffel, but also by others since the start of the century. It is certain that in the late 1860s Hodges had a lathe set up as a milling machine because the even cut marks can be seen under the strap of his actions of the period, but this would have been the exception. The brace and bow drill would have been the tools in common use, along with, of course, ubiquitous files. There was a reason why so many of the specialist gunmaking trades included the word "filer" in their name, be they barrel filer, action filer, furniture filer, pistol filer or cock filer. The file was the tool they all used more than any other. A limited range of bits, taps, chisels, cutters, and drifts were available commercially, but the standard practice was for each actioner to make these tools for himself, along with all the jigs and patterns needed to get the right shape and dimensions for the job in hand.

A Grant pinfire of 1868 actioned by Hodges

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There were many breech action designs that appeared between 1850 and 1880, each requiring its own specialised set of forgings and tooling. Most were protected by patent for a period of up to 14 years, so Hodges would have had to balance the choice of actions he would make, the demand for them, and the issue of whether to design his own and if not how to secure the right to manufacture a design protected by another's patent. It is also easy to forget, as we look back on the surviving specimens from this period, that we are doing so with the benefit of a century and a half of hindsight. We know now which designs were robust and stood up to prolonged use, and for those that were deficient, we know where the weaknesses are that would be their undoing. The original patentees had to rely on only their imagination, and an often imperfect understanding of engineering principles, of the properties of the materials they were working with, and of the stresses and strains that would be undergone on firing. The fact that actions from the period designed by the likes of Jones, Westley Richards, Purdey, Lancaster and Dougall are still sometimes in use today is an extraordinary tribute to the men of the period – a tribute that will bear repeating as successive waves of technical advances transformed the gun trade in the last half of the century.

Edwin Hodges (left) seated next to Henry Atkin in 1898

John Wilkes came to London to work for Hodges when he qualified as a gunmaker and the family believes that he worked for Hodges for about 4 years. There are no records that allow us to pinpoint exactly when this period with Hodges started or ended but it is probable that it was in the period between 1875 and 1880, right at the peak of the production of the 1871 patent action. At that time Hodges had a workshop at the back of his house at 8 Florence Street in Islington. In the 1871 census he is shown as employing 9 men and 3 boys. He numbered his actions on the back so it is possible to estimate the volume of his production. In the ten years to 1877, these numbers advanced from around 1700 to 3600 – suggesting Hodges and his men were actioning about 4 guns per week. Hodges also sold guns under his own name initially from Florence St, but from 1876 to 1881 he also had an address at 95 Mount Street in Mayfair, which was presumably intended as a more fashionable base for his retail operation.

Hodges action number 1701 on the back of the action of the Grant pinfire

Given the uniformity of style of Hodges actions it is likely that the work in his shop would have been organised as a production line with each man taking responsibility for a particular phase of the process. We do not know what the young John Wilkes did in this operation. Fifteen years later he was to describe himself as a stocker and finisher so it may have been that his role was to shape up and finish file the actions ready for stocking and perhaps stocking those that Hodges took through to completion in his own shop. It is probable that Wilkes saw his time in this workshop as a means to an end right from the outset.

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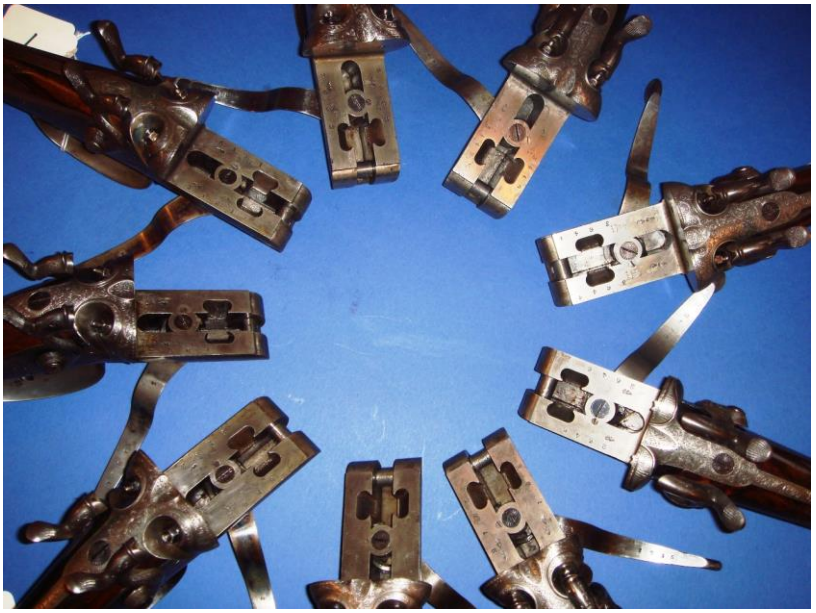
When the time came to move on, the story goes that Hodges was reluctant to let John go, so he decided that it might be easier to leave if he was dismissed for lateness. Workers that failed to arrive on time in those days were usually locked out. The first morning he tried this he found Hodges at the door holding it open for him, so the plan failed. However John Wilkes was determined to move on, and this he did around 1880, apparently without acrimony, to join a firm with whom the Wilkes family were already connected; that of James Dalziel Dougall.



Nine Hodges made Jones action hammer guns showing the uniformity achieved in the Hodges factory. Note particularly the very difficult to make cylindrical bridges in the action slots supporting the lever. The majority of makers cut these square.

Dougall and the Lockfast Legacy

As mentioned before, the 1881 census had John Wilkes living with his mother Ann in Limehouse. In January 1883 at the age of 26 he was married in Bromley by Bow in East London to Louisa Mary Philpot, another Londoner five years his junior. John and Louisa started a family soon after their marriage; their first child called Louisa Eleanor was born that same year, followed by two sons, John William, born in 1886 and Thomas Montgomery in 1889. These two will figure prominently in our story. They were followed by another daughter Eleanor Maud in 1892, another son Frederick George born in 1894 and a daughter Ethel Lillian, born in 1896. Their last child a daughter, Violet was born in 1901 but died barely a year later. In the 1891 census the Wilkes family are recorded as living at 6 Trellis Street in Bow, about a mile north of their address of ten years earlier. Trellis Street was a short road bisected by the railway line to Southend-on-Sea, which would have dominated its inhabitants. It no longer exists; the area having been extensively rebuilt since the war. By the next census in 1901, the family had moved away from the East End and was residing at 61 Leyton Park Road in Leytonstone, about 4 miles north and east of Bow and not far from the site that was the main venue for the 2012 Olympic Games. The house, which would have been newly built in 1901, still exists today in a quiet street of two storey London yellow stock brick terraced houses, each with a porch and a bay window.

James Dalziel Dougall

James Dalziel Dougall succeeded to ownership of his family's business in Glasgow in 1841 at the age of about 23. By then it was described as a gunmaker although it had begun in 1760 as a tackle maker. Dougall was a writer of books on shooting and letters to the sporting press both of which helped him to be an effective self-publicist for his gunmaking business. He was also a prolific inventor and it was one of his inventions that did much to establish his reputation as gunmaker. This was the Lockfast action that was patented in 1860, right at the beginning of the breech loading era.

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The early drop down breech loaders all confronted the problem of how best to provide a secure bolting of the barrels to the action that would withstand the pressure when the gun was discharged. The early Lefaucheux actions that were secured by a single bite near to the pivot were criticised for being too weak. There were a great many different designs conceived to address these problems. One of the most successful of these was the Lancaster, in which the barrels slid forward on opening before dropping down, a bite on the rear lump that held the barrels tight to the action when closed disengaging with the forward movement which was brought about by a cam attached to a rotary underlever. The Lancaster action was in fact a French invention by L.J. Gastinne, patented in England by a patent agent Auguste Bellford in 1853 and than assigned to Charles Lancaster, who was to use this action extensively and exclusively for the next 15 years[11]. In 1859 the Jones underlever was patented which, hindsight now tells us, was one of the most successful breech closing mechanisms of them all. When Dougall introduced his patent in 1860, the Jones action was still protected and gunmakers seeking to build their reputations as makers of breech loaders needed their own design. The Lockfast was to achieve this for Dougall exceptionally well.

The Lockfast was similar to the Lancaster in that it relied on a short forward movement of the barrels by about 10 mm along their axis, after which they dropped down to allow the loading of cartridges. Like the Lancaster this forward movement disengaged a bite on the back of the lump from a slot beneath the action face, but it was achieved by the gun having an elliptical cross pin that was attached to a lever protruding from the side of the action at the knuckle, by which it could be rotated through a quarter turn. The single lump had a hook that was shaped such that the crosspin acted as cam, forcing the barrels back as it was rotated. The Dougall action evolved over time and particularly the position and direction of rotation of the lever was different in the later guns as were some other details of the barrel bolting. A particular feature of Lockfasts is the provision of two circular bushes let into the action face, concentrically with the chambers and of the same diameter as the rim recess in the barrels, which are cut deeper than usual. These served as an additional bolting and sealing mechanism to hold the barrels down as the rim recesses slid back over them as the barrels were closed.

A good Dougall Lockfast 10 bore. The quality is evident.

Lockfast guns and rifles were made in both pinfire and later centre fire variants. The patent drawings even show a breech loading percussion action with no provision for a cartridge at all. Surviving examples show both the highest quality of manufacture and also a particular elegance of design. The fact that many remain usable today is testament to the strength and robustness of the mechanical design as well as to the quality of Dougall's manufacture. Commercially the Lockfast was to prove a considerable success for Dougall, perhaps aided by his effective use of the press to promote its advantages. In 1864 he opened a shop in London at 59 St James's Street, which he ran along with the business in Glasgow.

St James's Street is a wide gently sloping thoroughfare that runs from Piccadilly at its northern end to join Pall Mall at the southern end opposite St James's Palace. In the 1860s it was the very centre of the London gun trade; Boss & Co were at 73, Moore and Woodward at 64 and Rigby and Grant were to open shops at 72 and 67A respectively before the end of the decade, with Gye & Moncrieff to occupy 60 in 1876. As the properties were numbered sequentially this means that in the late 1870s within the space of a couple of hundred yards there were six gunmakers on the west side of St James's Street.

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As well as advertising his Royal patronage in the rib inscriptions of his guns, Dougall also used the Prince of Wales' feathers in their decoration, probably illegally.

In 1872, largely on the success of the Lockfast, Dougall was granted a Royal Warrant to supply guns and rifles to Albert Edward, the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII. David Baker[3] reports two examples of the action as still being in the Sandringham gunroom, a pinfire made for the Prince in 1864 and a centre fire made for him in the 1870s. Dougall was an astute businessman and made conspicuous reference to his Royal patronage in engraved inscriptions on many of the guns he was to make subsequently. He was at the time at the height of his success. Gun numbering suggests he was making over 130 guns and rifles a year in the 1860s and, with a prestigious address and Royal Warrants, everything must have looked very promising.

Brown[7] describes how Dougall Senior had been involved in discussion with Capt. Schulze about the formation of a company to make smokeless powder as early as 1864. Whether this early interest was fuelled by the realisation that the Lockfast would not be a cash cow for ever we can only speculate. In the event, it was to be his son, confusingly also called James Dalziel Dougall, that was to take an active part in powder manufacturing as it developed, driven by the growing popularity of smokeless powders in the 1880s. Dougall Junior had joined his father in the running of the London business and took over its day to day management in the early1870s whilst another son John ran the Glasgow firm. By that time, James Dougall Senior was much involved in writing books, articles and letters to the sporting press. Production in the 1870s as gauged by the advance of their numbers was running at just under 100 guns a year. Whilst the Lockfast was still being made it would have been increasingly hard to sell against the easier to operate snap action hammer guns that were then being widely offered. In response, a snap version of the Lockfast was developed opened by a forward moving lever mounted under the action in front of the guard.

The deaths of both Dougalls, father and son, in the early 1890s accelerated the decision to close the London arm of the business, but business for them had already become increasingly difficult as the legacy of the Lockfast diminished in value.

The Dougalls decided to employ John Wilkes around 1880 in all probability. At the time they had a workshop above the shop, where they employed, according to the 1881 census, ten men. It is not known if Wilkes was employed initially as workshop manager, but he seems to have taken on that position early on in his time with Dougall. About the time that John Wilkes joined the firm, the business moved in 1882 a short distance from 59 St James's Street to 8 Bennett Street, a side street to St James's Street on the west side nearest to Piccadilly. In the same year as the move, the firm's name was changed to J.D. Dougall & Sons.

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John Wilkes around the time he worked for Dougall in the mid-1880s, when he was about 30 years old.

A story from the Bennett Street days confirms that the Prince of Wales was still commissioning firearms from Dougall. He had indicated his wish to come and inspect progress with a gun that was being made for him in the workshop. On the appointed day, the apprentices had all been given clean white starched aprons and whilst they were waiting for their royal visitor, with Messrs Dougall and Wilkes downstairs in the front shop, they were entertaining themselves by flicking bits of tow soaked in red oil at one another's aprons. This was the intensely coloured blood red infusion of alkanet root in linseed oil that was used to colour and bring out the figure in stocks. The Prince of Wales duly arrived and was shown up the stairs followed by Dougall and Wilkes. As he did so he was carrying his hat in front him rather like one would carry a bowl of soup. Emerging at the top of the stairs and into the workshop he was positioned just right to catch one of the pieces of oil soaked tow in his hat. Dougall was at a loss and signalled that Wilkes as workshop manager had to say something. On the spur of the moment he could think of nothing better to say than "Well held, Sir". The Prince was able to see the funny side of what had happened, the hat was taken away from him and a replacement was made with extreme urgency, in all probability by James Lock in St James's Street, and delivered by hand to the Prince as quickly as possible.

As an aside from this era, there is a story passed down in the Wilkes family from the 1880s which is revealing of the working relationships in the trade. John was in Birmingham having a discussion in a pub with William Tranter. Tranter was forty years older than Wilkes and would have then been in his late sixties and nearing retirement but he remained a leading light of the Birmingham trade. He had been highly inventive in his prime and contributed a number of patents most famously those aimed at the improvement of the revolver. In 1867 he had built a very large factory on a four-acre site in Lichfield Road, Aston intended for military weapon manufacture; the first of its kind on such a scale. Although Tranter and Wilkes were two generations apart in age, it is highly likely that Tranter would have known Wilkes through his grandfather Joseph and Uncle John. The Tranters and the Wilkes were close neighbours in the same street in Aston, and Joseph was also a pistol maker. During the conversation, the need for something to be fetched cropped up and Tranter volunteered that he would ask "the boy" to fetch it when he returned from his current errand. Boys were widely employed in the trade, some as apprentices, but for those that lacked the aptitude to train to be a craftsman, there was plenty of work moving part-made arms around the gunmaking quarter between the various outworker shops. After a while an elderly man, older and more fragile than Tranter himself, came into the pub, spoke briefly to Tranter and then left. It was only after he had gone that Wilkes realised this must have been "the boy" referred to earlier. Tranter presumably had grown up referring to this long serving employee by that title, and had not felt the need to change it.

The 1880s saw Dougall's production fall again to about 50 a year, and Dougall Junior seems to have been devoting increasing amounts of time to the manufacture of smokeless powders, following from his father's earlier encounters with Schultze. It was in 1887 that the extra pressure generated by smokeless powders were first recognised by a higher level of proof, so this period would have been one of rapidly growing activity for the powder makers. The Smokeless Powder

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Company was founded by Dougall Junior and others in 1888 on an 126 acre site at Barwick in Hertfordshire, some 30 miles north of London[19]. Dougall took the role of Managing Director, the company's first products reaching the market in 1890.

The lever cocked Dougall described in the text

There are no records of the gun business so we are reliant on surviving examples to get a picture of Dougall's products. Of those guns from the hammerless era from 1880 into the 1890s, the impression is that no two are the same. They all have a distinctive style and most were high quality. Dougall had a stamp of the word "Highest" which was used on the action flats of those firearms that merited it. There were hammerless versions of the Lockfast made, both sidelock and boxlock, which unsurprisingly failed to repeat the commercial success of its predecessor and, of the rest of their products, there is sometimes little that differentiates them mechanically from those of their competitors.

A gun from this era came up recently at auction. It had a boxlock action with tumblers and sears set up as in an A&D action, but was cocked by a side lever which also opened the gun using a Purdey bolt. It had ejectors that worked longitudinally in the fore-end, cocked by the extractors and tripped by two rods running in holes along the base of the action where they engaged with the fired tumblers. Whilst there was little about the gun to mark it out as unusual, it was in detail entirely different from anything else on the market – a totally proprietary design but one that enjoyed no obvious advantage over its competitors. It seems that the Dougalls remained committed to the business model that had worked for them in the 1860s, that of making small numbers of high quality bespoke guns and rifles by hand, largely on the premises and wherever possible to proprietary designs.

As production declined, and with a growing family to support, John Wilkes must have started planning his next move. Others were doing the same, however. Edgar Harrison let slip in conversation with Dougall that he had been in discussion with Wilkes about his moving to join the then rapidly growing Cogswell & Harrison business. In fact, no such conversation had taken place. When Dougall asked Wilkes about it, the latter was furious that Harrison should have tried to undermine his position in this way. He went round to C&H's shop wanting to confront Harrison. When the latter declined to see him, Wilkes was so annoyed that before making a dramatic exit he brought his cane down with a bang on the glass topped display cabinet that served as a counter, causing the glass to crack right across. When his grandson, also John Wilkes, was visiting C&H's front shop on business some 50 years later he noticed that the counter was a display cabinet covered with a thick layer of green baize. During a lull in the proceedings he lifted the baize to find the glass top underneath had a crack running from front to back.

James Dougall senior died in February 1891 at the age of 72, leaving an estate of only £260. After his death, the London and Glasgow arms of the business continued to operate under sons James and John respectively. The Wilkes account of this period is that James' time was almost entirely taken up with the Smokeless Powder Company Ltd. John Wilkes ran the London arm of the gunmaking business although there is no evidence that he had any kind of partnership arrangement with Dougall. The family history is that they would meet on Thursdays for lunch in

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London, but that the day to day running of the business was otherwise entirely left to Wilkes. Dougall was well connected in the trade, as his father had been, serving from 1892 to 1895 as chairman of the Armourer's Club, the forerunner of the Gun Trade Association.

Moving On

By 1890 the trade was reaching the end of a period of more than 30 years of extraordinary inventiveness which had taken it from the muzzle loading percussion gun of the 1850s to the breech loading hammerless ejector of the late 1880s. Many makers had prospered on the back of inventions they had made or bought into, producing these under patent protection and advertising the unique advantages of their proprietary products to would-be customers. As we have seen Dougall was one of these. To those that had been in the trade through this period of tremendous change it must have seemed obvious that the route to future prosperity lay in further invention. Frederick Beesley and H.A.A. Thorn of Charles Lancaster exemplify makers who in this period continued to invent and patent actions and gun components in the hope of securing a commercial return for them. We now know that, with a few notable exceptions, the trade had already produced most of the inventions that it would need for the next century or more; The Anson and Deeley boxlock, the Rogers action sidelock, the Purdey bolt, the Anson rod fore-end catch and Scott spindle were all established and by 1890 were becoming freely available for use by all as patents expired. As this happened, the Birmingham trade started producing competitively priced partially machined or complete components for these actions. Those making patent actions had to get the corresponding components for their proprietary designs forged and machined to order, resulting in higher costs and a more specialised workforce. They then had the challenge of persuading their customer to pay a premium price to offset the higher manufacturing costs. One by one the makers that had relied hitherto on patented actions were to gravitate to standard designs for the side by side gun, with the best makers improving these with relatively minor proprietary variations. In London, only Purdey would continue producing exclusively an entirely proprietary action.

Whilst Dougall, as we have seen, seems to have been intent on trying to find a proprietary successor to the Lockfast that would repeat its commercial success, John Wilkes must have seen that producing relatively low volumes of patent actions with a London based manufacturing operation was never going to be a profitable way to run a small gunmaking business. The family recounts how Wilkes once told Frederick Beesley, who was ten years his senior and in the 1880s at the peak of his inventiveness, to stop inventing things and to focus his energy instead on making guns. Wilkes must have firmly believed there was a large market for competitively priced, well-made guns and rifles based on standard designs. By the early 1890s he was certainly planning to set up on his own to tap into this market, using his contacts in the Birmingham trade to change the way he made and sold guns. Exactly when or how he made the break with Dougall is far from clear. In a trade label of First World War vintage Wilkes was to describe his business as "Established in 1890", but the first guns to be recorded were not made until 1895, the same year that he appears under his own name at a separate address in directories.

He was still involved with Dougall in early 1896. The Wilkes family history holds that in early January of that year Wilkes and Dougall Junior parted after one of their Thursday lunches and that, on the way home, Dougall had a seizure from which he subsequently died at the early age of 46. This suggests that Wilkes was establishing his own business whilst continuing to look after Dougall's. Although the younger Dougall had been more prosperous than his father in later years; he left an estate of some £3600, fifteen times bigger than his father's, his death was to cause the immediate closure of the London arm of J.D.Dougall & Sons. The Glasgow arm was

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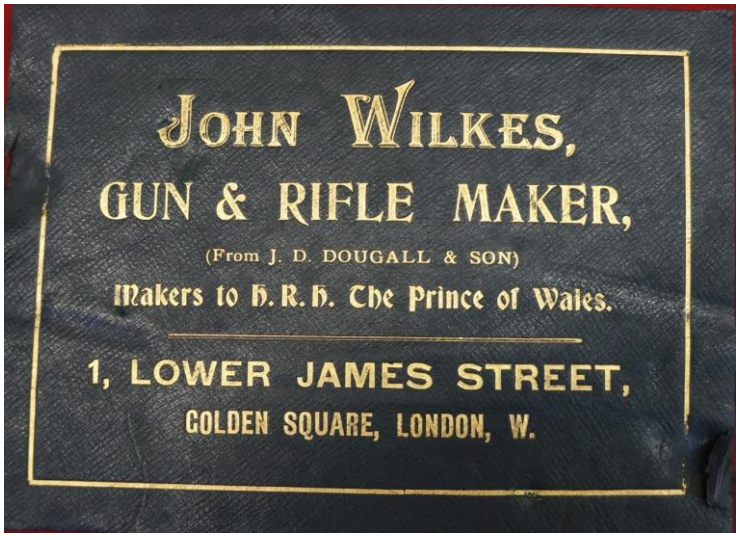
sold about the same time to a member of the Ingram family who continued to trade under the Dougall name for some years.

The Gunmakers Association at Eyeworth Lodge in 1896

John Wilkes in the back row left

Just five months after Dougall's death, the Gunmakers' Association had an outing to inspect the Schultze Powder factory in the grounds of Eyeworth Lodge in the middle of the New Forest in Hampshire[19]. The visit is recorded in a group photograph showing many pillars of the late Victorian gun trade on the terrace of the Lodge. Wilkes is there, one of only two of the seventy or so participants to sport a top hat, positioned at one side of the group in the back row.

The Bennett Street shop was vacated, to be occupied, albeit briefly, by Bozard and Co., and the stock in trade, which included some partially completed Dougall proprietary actions, was moved by John Wilkes to his own premises. There is a family story about the bureaucracy that manages the issuing of Royal Warrants catching up with the John Wilkes business well into the next century. It is possible that they did so because Wilkes was to make reference to his past association with Dougall to advertise his own business and in doing so sometimes made reference to the latter's royal warrants. Dougall himself had used these quite blatantly,


JOHN WILKES,
GUN & RIFLE MAKER,
(From J. D. DOUGALL & SON)
Makers to H.R.H. The Prince of Wales.
1, LOWER JAMES STREET,
GOLDEN SQUARE, LONDON, W.

The smashing of the Royal Warrant plate may have had something to do with the arguably misleading style of Wilkes' early labels. This one, from the case for a pair of good boxlocks delivered a few months after Dougall's death in 1896, leaves it far from clear if it was Dougall or Wilkes that held the Warrant. Subsequent publications altered the punctuation and fonts to make its attribution to Dougall unambiguous.

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sometimes engraving the Prince of Wales' feathers on the actions of his guns. Wilkes had kept under his desk an engraved and coloured glass plate depicting the Dougall warrant to the Prince of Wales that had been displayed in the window of both Dougall shops in St James's. Somehow those managing Royal Warrants had become aware of its existence and they duly visited John Wilkes shop and broke the glass plate to pieces there and then. A more enduring memento was a set of jigs for making the oval cross pins of Lockfasts that were to survive in the Wilkes shop right up to the time of its closure 107 years later, allowing them to make the boast that they were the only shop in London fully equipped to re-joint a Lockfast.

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Chapter 3 - The New Business

In the early 1890s, John Wilkes, in his late thirties and with a wife and the first three of six children to support, decided to set up his own gun and rifle making business. Whether his employer at the time, J.D. Dougall the younger, was aware of his plans we can only surmise. By the time of his death in early 1896 he must have known what was going on because Wilkes by then had already been trading from a separate address for over a year and had started selling guns under his own name. The fact that the two men were still having regular and apparently cordial discussions about the Dougall gunmaking business up to the time of Dougall's sudden demise suggests that the parting of the ways was agreed and gradual. It has also been suggested that Wilkes had been expecting to take over the gunmaking side of Dougall's business, a plan that was only thwarted by Dougall's death. It is unlikely that this was the case as Wilkes was clearly planning his own business for some time before this unexpected event.

Wilkes initially did not go into business on his own. The first directory entry shows that the business traded in 1894 as Wilkes and Harriss, the latter disappearing very quickly from the scene. We don't know what role Harriss played. Henry Joseph Harriss was born in the Curragh Camp in Ireland to a military family around 1862, and was describing himself as a Gun Manufacturer and an employer in 1891. He was appointed manager of James Lang in 1893 following Webley's purchase of this business. This was very probably the same individual that entered into partnership with John Wilkes. The Wilkes family believe his role was just to keep the books, but it is likely that he filled a more significant role; perhaps Wilkes felt that he needed a partner to look after the business during the period he was partly committed to Dougall, or Harriss may have contributed some of the capital needed to get the business going. Whatever the basis of the relationship, this was to be the first and last occasion on which the John Wilkes business would have a partnership interest held by someone outside the family. Harriss' son, born in 1890, was named Henry Trulock Harriss, suggesting there was a familial connection with the long establish Dublin gunmaker of Trulock and Harriss. Henry H.J. Harriss appears to have carried on in managerial roles in the London trade until at least 1901, but thereafter there is no unambiguous trace of him. Boss & Co documents show a J. Harriss as an established outworker of theirs in 1908/9, but it is not certain this was the same individual. Then between 1909 and 1919 a firm was trading as H Trulock Harriss at addresses close to St James' Street. Although this is in the name of Harriss' son, it is probable that both father and son were involved in this venture.

The Wilkes family believes that the first premises rented by John as the base for his new business was close to Dougall's Bennett Street premises in King Street, St James's. This is the rather imposing thoroughfare, now the location of Christie's auction house, which runs east from St James's Street into the even more imposing St James's Square. Nigel Brown[7] has not unearthed any documentary evidence of Wilkes trading at this address, so whatever tenancy he may have had there was, in all probability, very short lived.

Soho

We know that by 1894 the Wilkes and Harriss business was recorded at 1 Lower James Street, Golden Square, a short walk from Piccadilly Circus and on the edge of London's Soho district, the area that would be the home of the business for the next 109 years.

Soho, in the centre of London's West End, is about a mile square, bordered to the north by Oxford Street, to the west by Regent Street, to the east by Charing Cross Road and to the south by Leicester Square. First developed in the seventeenth century it had become more neglected in the nineteenth century as more fashionable areas had been redeveloped to the west and south in

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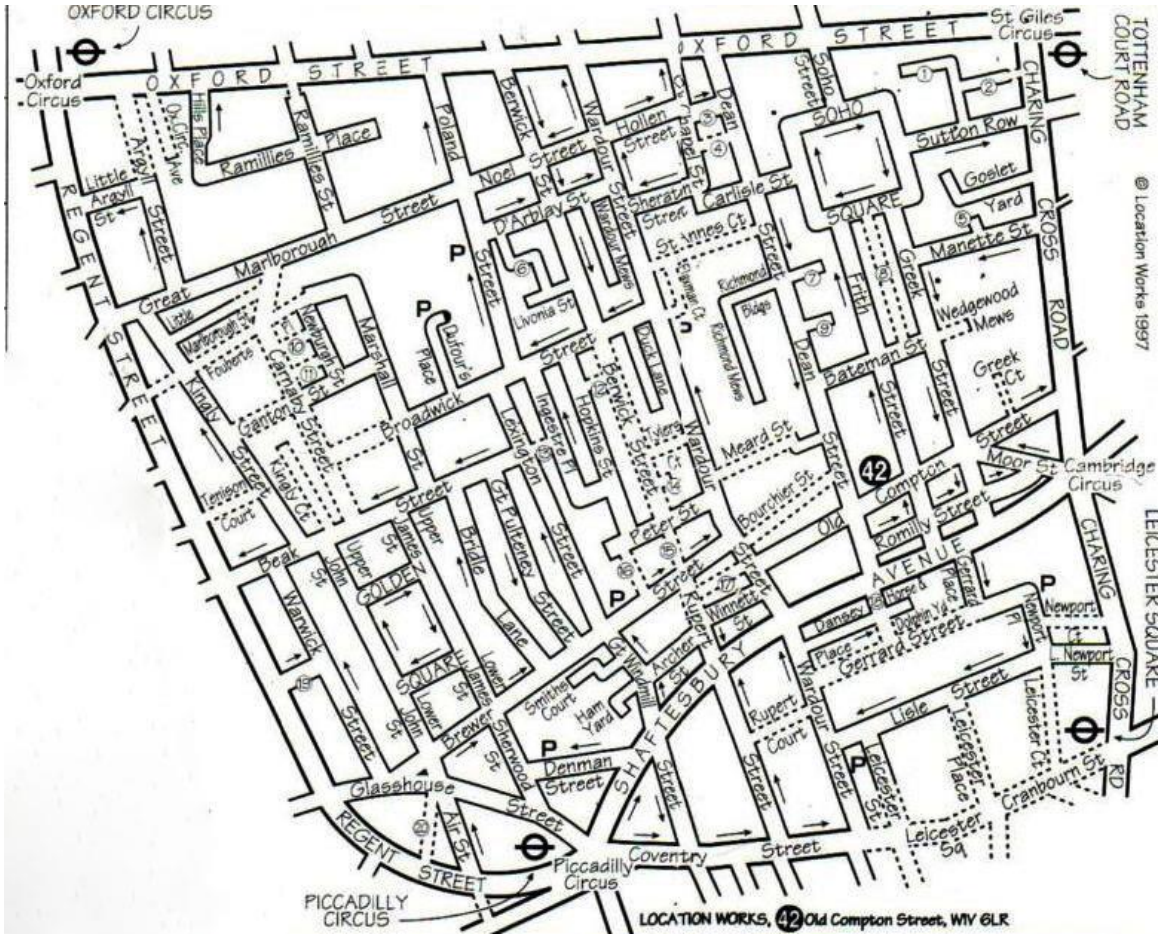
Mayfair and St James, and to the north and east in Fitzrovia and Bloomsbury. In 1854 there had been a cholera epidemic, whose cause was discovered to be a water supply in Broad Street right in the centre of Soho, which was so severe that the outcry that followed it led to the complete rebuilding of a modern sewage system for the whole of London. No major thoroughfares crossed Soho until the construction of Shaftesbury Avenue and Charing Cross Road in the late 1870s. The former runs east from Piccadilly Circus to meet the latter at Cambridge Circus. Whilst Charing Cross Road (called in the 1880s Castle Street south of Cambridge Circus and Crown Street to the north of it) served to provide a clear delineation of the eastern boundary of Soho, the construction of Shaftesbury Avenue separated a small triangle of the district in the south east corner nearest to Leicester Square and centred around Gerrard Street. The streets of Soho ran mostly either north south, parallel to Regent Street, or east west, aligned with Oxford Street, but the sense of order implied by this is far from the case on the ground, the street plan resembling more a crossword puzzle than the clean grid of an American city. There were two small squares providing modest amounts of open space, Soho Square in the northeast close to the Charing Cross Road and Oxford Street junction, and Golden Square in the southwest close to the bend in Regent Street as it runs into Piccadilly. These spaces apart, the streets were mostly narrow, with interconnecting alleyways and hidden courtyards. Apart from a small number of naming changes the current street plan of Soho is as it was in the 1880s.


OXFORD CIRCUS
Oxford Circus
OXFORD STREET
St Giles Circus
TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD
CHARING CROSS ROAD
SOHO SQUARE
Sutton Row
Goslet Yard
Manette St
Wedgewood Mews
Greek Ct
Bateman St
Dean Street
Carlisle St
Sheraton Street
Hollen Street
Wardour Street
Berwick Street
Poland Street
Noel St
D'Arblay St
Marlborough Street
Great Marlborough St
Little Argyll St
Argyll St
Ramillies Place
Ramillies St
Oxford Ave
Mills Place
REGENT STREET
Marshall Street
Broadwick Street
Ingestre Pl
Livonia St
Duke Street
Richmond Mews
Richmond Pl
St Anne's Ct
Meard St
Bourchier St
Compton Street
Romilly Street
Moor St
Cambridge Circus
Old Compton Street
Dansey Place
Gerrard Street
Newport Pl
Newport Ct
Newport St
LEICESTER SQUARE
Leicester Sq
Leicester Place
Cranbourn St
Rupert Court
Archer St
Wardour Street
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE
Denman Street
Glasshouse Street
Air St
Piccadilly Circus
Coventry Street
PICCADILLY CIRCUS
Brewer St
Sherwood St
Lower John St
Upper John St
GOLDEN SQUARE
Lower James St
Upper James St
Great Pulteney Street
Bridle Lane
Smithies Court
Ham Yard
Warwick St
Beak St
Kingly Court
Kingly St
Carnaby St
Ganton St
Tenison Court
Newburgh St
Poland St
Dufour's Place
Hopkins St
Lexington St
Peter St
Winnett St
Upper St Martin's Lane
Lisle Street
Leicester Ct
Leicester Square
Whitcomb St
Greek St
Frith St
Soho Street
Richmond Mews
Blagdon
Wardour Mews
Sheraton Street
Carlisle St
Dean

By the 1890s Soho was no longer a hotbed of disease but, having become London's bohemian quarter, it had retained an air of disrepute. It was known for its artists, writers and left wing intellectuals, who congregated there and who frequented clubs, eating houses and pubs, for its prostitutes, and most significantly as far as the Wilkes story is concerned, for its artisan community. Craft trades of all kinds, gold and silver smiths, jewellers, sword makers and, of course, gunmakers congregated there finding Soho a convenient place to work. During the nineteenth century the smart places to shop had begun the migration away from the City of London to the West End, a trend that was to continue into the 20th century.

Nigel Brown[7] in his book has compiled from directories an extensive list of the names and addresses of the London gunmakers and their supporting trades in the 19th and 20th centuries. A study of this work shows much about the scale and working of the trade during this period and of its evolution. In the first half of the nineteenth century there were practitioners in London of all of the supporting trades, barrel forgers and makers, lock filers and polishers, furniture makers, stockers, engravers, case makers and implement makers. These businesses, mostly single individuals or families were distributed all around and in the City of London and around the West End, mostly to the north of the Thames. As the century progressed, the London trade contracted, as Birmingham became the centre for many of the component making trades, the railway providing a quick and reliable means of getting these parts to the capital. This contraction was accompanied by the trade concentrating in a few enclaves. Areas such as the Minories in the City itself, Whitechapel to the east, where the Gunmaker's Company's Proof House was and still is situated, Southwark to the south, and Clerkenwell and Farringdon to the north all had numerous gun trade workshops. But as retail outlets became mostly concentrated in the more fashionable West End, these locations became somewhat remote from the businesses they were serving. Soho was a cheap area to rent space that was a few minutes' walk from the thoroughfares of the West End. In the 1890s there were 30 or so gunmaking businesses of one sort or another in Soho and several more in the back streets of the immediately adjacent areas to the north of Oxford Street, to the east of Charing Cross Road, and south around Leicester Square.

1-2 Lower James Street today. It is not certain that this was the same building that Wilkes occupied - it has been extensively altered in recent years and numbering may have changed.

Golden Square looking south into Lower James Street. Wilkes' shop was on the first floor, probably in the smaller building beyond the one with the elaborate frontage.

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John Wilkes had been with Dougall at prestigious addresses, so probably understood the costs of occupying such premises and the volumes of retail business needed to support the rent. With this in mind he chose premises that were in Soho but within easy reach of the main thoroughfares of the West End.

Walking along Piccadilly towards Piccadilly Circus, the last side road on the left before the Circus is Air Street. It is a narrow but imposing thoroughfare with stone arches surmounted by colonnades on both sides of its nearby crossing with Regent Street, and appearing from Piccadilly rather as though it passes through a railway tunnel at this point. Air Street cuts straight across the much wider Regent Street as it leads into Soho and, after another short distance cuts straight across Glasshouse Street, where at number 29 the gunmaker F.T Baker had a shop in the early years of the 20th century, and ends at the next junction with Brewer Street. In total Air Street is barely 150m long. Directly opposite its end, and in line with it, is Lower John Street. After a few more yards walking in the same direction this opens into Golden Square, whose trees will have been visible in the distance on the walk from Piccadilly. Although not as grand or as large as the squares of St James's and Mayfair, Golden Square stands apart from the surrounding Soho streets by having far more imposing buildings, with ornamental gardens in its centre. Four short streets lead into Golden Square which are not well marked on some maps. Running up the west side of the square is Lower John Street which becomes Upper John Street on the north side of the square, and to the east of the square is Lower James Street leading into Upper James Street to the north. Both Upper John Street and Upper James Street end about 50m beyond the square at T-junctions where they meet Beak Street, about which we will hear more later.

1 Lower James Street was just off the south-east corner of the Golden Square. Wilkes' premises were on the first floor. He was one of five tenants in the building; the majority of the others, both in the building itself and in the short street in which it stood, being in the wool trade. There was a brass plate by the street door bearing the inscription "John Wilkes, Gun and Rifle Maker", which was to follow the firm to all of the subsequent premises they would occupy over the next 110 years. This had a space for a small inscription that invited customers to ring the bell to advertise their presence to those working upstairs. Wilkes appended Piccadilly Circus to his address on his early business cards, to emphasise his proximity to the West End.

The Register

Sadly, there are relatively few sources of information about the business that John Wilkes established in the 1890s. He kept, as did most gunmakers, a register of the guns he made that records against each number used particulars of the gun or rifle, its type, bore or calibre, key dimensions, the finisher who worked on the gun and particulars of its sale. As this register was maintained, but with varying degrees of diligence, throughout the life of the John Wilkes business, I have given more detail of the data that was recorded in the register in Appendix 2. In common with many small gunmaking firms, Wilkes probably saw completion of the details in the register as an irritating bureaucratic activity that added little value to the process of selling a gun and collecting the money for it. A hundred or more years later, the gun having survived in a serviceable condition, and its current owner now wanting to know about its origins, these corners cut on completing records can be very frustrating. Wilkes' register therefore serves to provide a partial and incomplete record of these early years, but it, along with the surviving guns and rifles from that period, is almost all the tangible evidence we have of the business prior to the 1914 war. The guns and rifles made during this period, many of which still exist, can provide invaluable pointers to the manufacturing methods used, especially so where they have not been extensively modified in the course of time.

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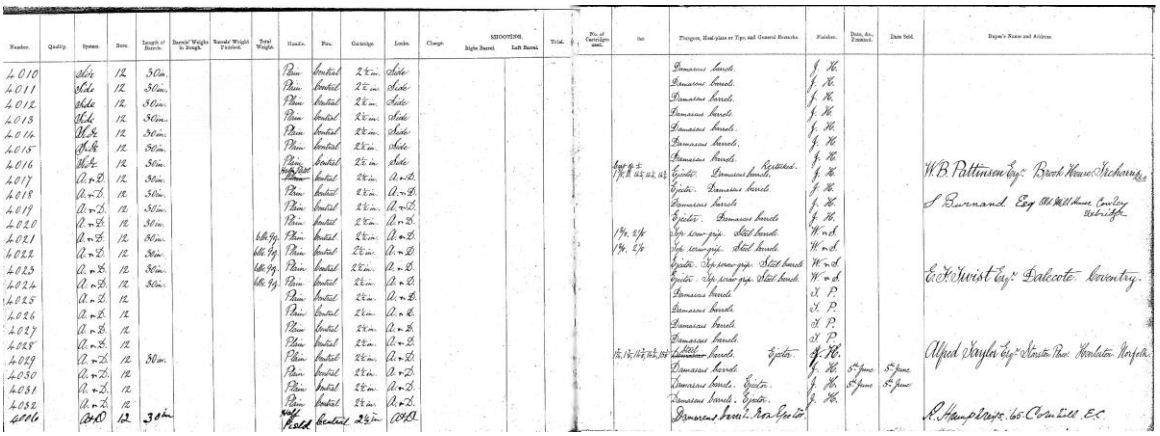
We know that Wilkes also kept ledgers that will have recorded all the orders he placed on suppliers and the invoices and accounts payable to match these. He will have kept ledgers for trade and retail customer orders, copies of invoices tendered and of customer accounts receivable. And finally there will have been wage books and ledgers to record the costs in running the shop and workshop. It was these records that were actually used to run the business and which contained the critical information about the input costs in making guns and rifles and the prices for which they were sold. The register and the information it contained was an afterthought to recording all the critical stages of manufacture, which perhaps accounts for the occasional lapses in its completeness. These ledgers running up to 1927 were together sufficiently bulky to have been boxed up in Beak St in the mid-1960s when they were taking up too much space in the shop, and a misunderstanding at the time of the next refuse collection resulted in the boxes in which they had placed for storage being taken away with the rubbish. We are left with only the register providing a continuous record of Wilkes' business in the period up to 1914. Thereafter there are a few ledgers covering the period to 1927, from which point complete records exist. We have no means of knowing precisely what information was lost in this accident but we can assume the ledgers will have been similar to those kept after 1927.



The first page in Wilkes' Register

The first gun recorded in Wilkes' own hand in the register is number 4010, a 12 bore sidelock non-ejector with 30" damascus barrels. There is space for 23 entries to the page and the first page runs from 4010 to 4032, whereupon an extra line is inserted containing an entry in a different hand for a 12 bore A&D gun, also with damascus barrels and a non-ejector and numbered 4006, which is thereby the earliest numbered gun in the record. Lamentably there are no dates on the first page apart from a record that guns 4030 and 4031 were sold on 5th June. On the next page there are more complete dates against some of the sales for August and September 1895, making it likely that the earliest recorded guns were sold earlier that year. Right from the outset Wilkes was recording in the register about 80 - 100 guns a year so that by mid-1900 the numbers had reached about 4500 without any significant gaps.

Gentleman Gunmaker

John Wilkes had clearly resolved to hit the ground running, probably realising that the low sales volumes that Dougall had been achieving in the 1890s were insufficient to generate the revenue and margin needed to get a new business off the ground. His family commitments had also increased. A daughter Eleanor had been born in 1892, the third son Frederick in 1894 and the last daughter Ethel was to be born in 1896. So a prosperous business right from the outset would have been essential.

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The brass plaque advertising John Wilkes' business. It followed the firm to all its addresses in over 110 years and is now on the door of Craig Whitsev's workshop in Arundel.

It appears that Wilkes started his numbering system to follow on from Dougall's, but the latter carried on producing firearms numbered in their sequence as well so this transition is far from clean. There is also at least one hybrid gun reported with Wilkes' name and address on the barrels and Dougall's name on the action – but this could equally well have been a gun that Wilkes re-barrelled at a later date. The extent to which he used his connection with his previous employer and his Royal warrant in these early years is illustrated by the inscription on a black leather trade label shown at the close of the previous chapter. He was to go on advertising himself for quite some time more modestly as "Late J.D. Dougall & Sons" on his business card, his trade labels and on the ribs of some of the guns he made.

The style of the launch of his business had much in common with that of Stephen Grant 25 years or so previously. Grant had been managing partner at Boss & Co, and when he left to set up on his own just a few doors away he too started up with an impressive volume of early production, securing a royal warrant within three years of start-up. Grant too advertised his earlier association with Boss, but as they were still very much in business after his departure, they in turn felt compelled to make public the fact that he no longer had any connection with them. Mr Wilkes seems to have avoided this complication and seems to have been able to trade unhindered as the *de facto* successor to Dougall's business in London.

Most of the leading players in the London and Birmingham trade photographed on the Gunmakers Association visit to the Kynoch factory in 1898.

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Dougall's shop in Bennett Street was taken over by Bozard and Co. By some means John Wilkes became one of 20 shareholders in this company after their move in to the premises, perhaps in return for some of the assets left in the shop. There was certainly a Bozard stamp in Beak Street shop in recent years and three gun numbers in Wilkes register have Bozard's name pencilled against them. Bozard was to be wound up in 1901 although the business has recently been re-launched.

Three photographs survive of John Wilkes taken about this time. A portrait, probably taken in the 1880s and in the possession of the family, shows Wilkes as a relatively young man, in top hat and wing collar. The other two are both group photographs of the Gunmakers Association. The first is taken on the previously mentioned Schultze visit in June 1896 in which Mr Wilkes appears again in top hat and now sporting a large moustache. The second is a much larger group from the same organisation taken 18 months later on a visit to the Kynoch factory in February 1898. The background to this photograph is much more austere being the end wall of the factory sporting the words "KYNOCH LIMITED" in large letters. There are over 200 people in the photograph which is helpfully provided with a good key to identify who they are. Mr Wilkes, still sporting the moustache but minus the hat cuts an imposing figure in this group. A fair number of those present are Kynoch staff but the Gunmakers Association fielded about 170 people for that visit. Amongst them are some of the leading members of the late Victorian trade. The London trade is represented by both John Robertsons, father and son, by Henry Atkin, Frederick Beesley, Edwin Churchill, Edgar Harrison, Edwin Hodges and several others. From the Birmingham trade are, amongst others, Messrs Powell, Webley and Scott, and from the provincial trade are the likes of Messrs Green, Rosson and Gibbs. With the obvious exception of representatives from Purdey, Holland and Woodward and from the many smaller Birmingham makers, this photo captures better than most the key players in the trade at the time.

John Wilkes in a detail from the Kynoch photograph, this time without hat.

Profitable Gunmaking

Before looking at some of the individual guns made in these early years, we need to look at the way that John Wilkes ran his business, his business model in today's jargon, which was to continue basically unaltered for 45 years through to the start of the 1939 war. As outlined above, the evidence in these early years is sparse, but as time progresses it becomes more complete, and as a clearer picture emerges it can be used to make inferences about the early years.

In this 45 year period, the majority of the guns and rifles sold bearing the John Wilkes name were made in Birmingham. A small proportion of these were sent to London for finishing and a few guns were made up and finished in London. These London made or finished guns were nearly all sold retail by Wilkes, there being named customers recorded against each of them and most of these also have detailed dimensions recorded in the register.

Birmingham Connections

Many of the Birmingham made guns that survive from the early days are of conspicuously good quality – although they are by no means all best guns. They are usually well filed, tastefully engraved and, where the original stocks have survived, these are usually very well figured for the grade of gun. Most have suffered to a degree in over a century of use, but the original quality still

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shows through. Mr Wilkes seems to have been aiming right from the start to provide guns in a range of grades where each one represented the best example available at the price, a policy followed by the firm for the next half century. With the Birmingham trade at the turn of the century being called upon to supply guns not just to many of the other London makers but to the whole country and the Empire, a key question is how John Wilkes was able to source around 100 guns a year from Birmingham, whilst at the same time making sure he always got the best work for the price.

The answer lies in one of the loose ends in the story so far. His uncle, also John Wilkes, had been in business in Birmingham as an action maker and then as a gunmaker since 1860. Although the uncle was to die in 1916 without any gunmakers amongst his children, his business, which was based behind 24 High Street in Aston, was to be expanded considerably by the London branch in the years immediately after the 1914-18 war. It seems likely therefore that the firm started by his uncle was used by the nephew in London as a base for his business dealings in Birmingham and that the younger John became involved in the running of that business at some point between 1895 and 1911, by which time Uncle John, then 75, was describing himself as "retired gunmaker". Even a decade earlier in 1901, Uncle John was reporting himself as "working on his own account", his business having shrunk from 30 years previously when he had 5 people in his employ. It is probable that John Wilkes in London was using the Birmingham arm of the business to source work from the trade in that city. He may have started doing this when with Dougall. His uncle, with a lifetime of connections in the Birmingham trade, would have known where to go for the best work at the best price.

Without any details of the orders or invoices from this period we are largely dependent on just one column in the register for clues about the sourcing of this early production of the London business. This is the column headed "Finisher" in which Wilkes would enter an initial or initials which would usually indicate the source of the gun or rifle. In the larger gunmaking workshops, the finisher was the craftsman who brought together the various component parts of the gun, sometimes combining this with stocking and screwing; the elegance, correct working and overall quality of the final product being in his hands. In the Wilkes register, where this column contained a "JW" this indicated that the components of the firearm were made up by trade outworkers and finished by Wilkes personally.

The majority of guns had other entries in this column. In these cases the entry relates to the maker rather than to just the finisher. As has been reported in many sources, the Birmingham trade was very much geared up to supplying guns and rifles for both London and provincial makers to sell under their own names. They were very flexible in their product offerings making it difficult to establish the extent to which the nominal maker actually contributed in the manufacture. At one end of the spectrum the Birmingham trade could perform certain steps in the manufacturing process up to and including providing barrels and actions or fully stocked guns "in the white", thereby allowing the maker whose name appeared on the finished gun to do the finishing, engraving and hardening. But for many of the Birmingham made guns sold, the gun was supplied fully engraved and hardened and bearing a number in the retailer's number sequence. Where the retailer was London based, the gun could have been submitted, for an extra charge, to London Proof, and would be filed and engraved according to the retailer's house style.

Guns that came in from Birmingham fully finished were ready to go straight into the racks for retail sale. All the nominal "maker" had to do was to manage the numbering of the firearms supplied and to make sure that the quality of what he was selling under his name was maintained at the level he wanted. In Wilkes' register we find blocks of sequentially numbered guns all coming from the same "finisher" and there are some instances where gaps appear where numbers

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appear to have been reserved to a particular finisher which were not made. And there are a few instances where two guns from different finishers come in with the same number. In the early years John Wilkes seems to have been very efficient at managing numbering, but there were to be periods later where this would become a little ragged.

Managing the quality of the supply was not so easy for London and provincial "makers" who didn't have the contacts in the Birmingham trade. Wilkes started in business with the advantage of having had his early training in Birmingham and of having his uncle's business established there. As we shall see this personal contact with the Birmingham trade would be continued by his son Jack, and throughout the period up to the second war Wilkes would maintain a reputation of being able to source better work from Birmingham than any of the London makers.

When it comes to identifying where the guns sourced in Birmingham were made we have only the entry in the "Finisher" column in the register in the years between 1895 and 1927. Sometimes these are cryptic – a single letter "H" for example, sometimes a little fuller than this, such as "H&N" or "CAW" and, very rarely, a full name is written in. Interpretation is further complicated by the gradual changing over time of the hieroglyphs used to represent particular makers. Thus JH becomes at some point just H, and W and HAW refer to the same maker, helpfully also referred to on one occasion as "Whitby". There is one other occasional clue. When guns were being supplied numbered, Wilkes allocated blocks of numbers to particular makers and sometimes this remains noted in the register in pencil. Mr Wilkes clearly intended this column to be an *aide memoire* to himself as to where particular guns had come from, rather than as a source of authoritative information for posterity. It was clearly in his interest that neither his customers nor fellow members of the trade who might have occasional sight of the register would be able to determine the sourcing of his guns.

In the Registers are details of just under 3200 guns and rifles made between 1895 and 2003 that bear the John Wilkes name. Of these, all but 114 have an entry in the finisher column and there are a total of 35 different finisher's abbreviations recorded. I believe I have been able to identify all but 14 of these, and these between them account for only 152 firearms, meaning that we are reasonably sure where all but 266 of the 3200 guns and rifles were made. Members of the Wilkes family finished 420 of these. Of the remainder, three generations of the Harper family made 1341, Holloway & Co and its successor, Holloway & Naughton, made 617, A.E.Bayliss made 247, H.A.Whitby 158 and Webley & Scott 56.

The only significant other contributor was abbreviated to TP and made 67 guns for Wilkes, all before 1900. This could have been Thomas Pryce of Bath St in Birmingham, but it is more likely to have been Thomas Perkes, an inventive gunmaker whose business at the time was in Swallow Street, off Piccadilly and about 300 yards from Wilkes' shop. Perkes made guns both under his own name and for the trade, and had, in the 1880s, filed a number of patents for ejector systems. Crudgington and Baker[12] give an account of these and of litigation over ejector patents between Perkes and Westley Richards, which was eventually to force the former out of business around the turn of the century. Perkes and Wilkes certainly knew one another. One of the stories that John told in later years was of an occasion when the two men were having a drink in a pub. On seeing the latch on the hatch in the bar counter, Perkes commented that it had given him an idea for new fore-end attachment. As there is no corroborating evidence that TP is Perkes, these 67 firearms are left in the unidentified total.

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Dealers

Having outlined the sourcing of the guns and rifles that bore the John Wilkes name, the other important issue is to understand how they were sold. In the early years there is very incomplete information in the register in the "Buyer's Name and Address" column. It is not until 1901 that entries are routinely made in this column. In the first 6 years or so there are entries of retail customers' names against a few guns, usually those of higher quality, the remainder having no entry at all. After 1901 the retail customer names are still entered against a minority of firearms, the remainder having a coded entry, identifying as the customer one or other of the dealers Edward Whistler and Charles Bowman-Vaughan. Shortly afterwards a uniform code was introduced that was to be used for the next 40 years, s single cross meaning the gun or rifle had gone to Whistler, two crosses marking it out to Vaughan. Both had premises in the Strand, the major thoroughfare that led eastwards from Trafalgar square towards the City of London, the former at No11 and the latter at No39, both addresses close to Trafalgar Square.

For the last fifty years shooters have become used to the idea that a gunmaker will usually be able to offer for sale both newly made guns and rifles to order and reconditioned second hand firearms of their own make and often other makes as well. This has not always been the case; for the whole of the nineteenth century and for the first half of the twentieth gunmakers saw their businesses as primarily making guns.

If gunmakers offered a second-hand specimen to customers seeking one of their guns they lost an opportunity to keep their men busy. It was diluting their main business. They would usually buy in used guns if by doing so they could secure an order to make new, but they would not normally offer the used examples for re-sale themselves. For this reason a separate trade developed, that of the dealer in second-hand guns and rifles, including in some instances new products that had been made up for stock. One of the most famous early practitioners of this trade was Joseph Lang, who built up his business by offering for sale at a discount the products of some of the great makers of the late flintlock and early percussion era, including those of his future father-in-law, James Purdey. It was only after the 1939-45 War when the increasing difficulty of getting new guns made up encouraged the trade to fully embrace the idea that gunmakers would also refurbish and sell used firearms, although at least one of the best makers still only does so very selectively.

Vaughan and Whistler's main business was buying and selling guns and they had the showroom and related facilities for entertaining retail customers interested in shooting, which, for the smaller firms like Wilkes, whose main business was gunmaking, would have been an expensive overhead. So the dealers sold a large proportion of John Wilkes' new production. In the period from the start of the business up to 1930, Wilkes sold under 10% of their production directly to retail customers. Most were sold through the dealers Vaughan and Whistler, with the former taking by far the larger share. The 10% direct sale did however include most of the best guns. Subsequently the proportion of retail sales was to rise to about 30% in the 1930s and to almost 100% thereafter, but looking at the totality of Wilkes' production over the years Vaughan sold about 60% of the weapons made and Whistler 10%. These numbers do not include the 420 (14%) or so specimens for which no buyers are recorded in the period before 1901 when dealer sales first appear in the register. It is a reasonable assumption that many or all of these also found their way into sportsmen's hands through these and perhaps other dealers, but there is no tangible evidence to support this.

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C.B. Vaughan

Charles Bowman-Vaughan junior was born in 1874. He joined his father of the same name in his business as a silversmith, jeweller and pawnbroker at 39 Strand around 1890. His father in turn had succeeded to the business from his Aunt in the 1870s and its ownership in the Vaughan family could be traced back to its foundation in 1782. Charles junior was the oldest of four siblings who lived with their parents and three domestic servants at a house in Lambeth, south of the river from Westminster. In the early nineteenth century the Vaughan business had advertised itself as a "gun repository" although in the later years of the century this aspect of the business, if it was still active, seems to have been down played relative to the firm's interests in jewellery and precious metals.

It seems likely that when he took over, the younger Charles Bowman-Vaughan determined to move his father's business into this trade as a dealer in guns. As the 20th Century progressed, the firm of C.B. Vaughan were to focus increasingly on this aspect of the trade, and less so on jewellery and silverware, retaining their pawn broking license as another source of guns to sell. As they moved more in to the gun trade, so the relationship with John Wilkes flourished. It seems to have been a genuinely symbiotic one between the two businesses.

Vaughan's considerable shop in the Strand on the corner of Buckingham Street, near Charing Cross Station, pictured in the 1920s. The site is now occupied by a 1960s concrete office block and Buckingham Street is a pedestrian passageway.

Vaughan's shop at 39 Strand was an imposing building of six floors with a wonderfully elaborate Victorian shop front with signage in many places. It was situated on a corner site on the southern side of the Strand close to Charing Cross Station. A picture of it in 1924 shows two display windows, the larger one on the corner filled with guns in vertical racks, the smaller to the left of the double doors filled with silverware and jewellery. The main sign just has the word "Vaughan" in large letters on both aspects of the corner, At first floor level on the apex of the corner is a vertical sign proclaiming " The Gun Market of the World – Hammerless Ejectors, Hammerless Guns, Hammer Guns, Automatic Pistols, Prismatic Binoculars – Bought Sold or Exchanged" a sign below apparently part of the original shop front proclaims " Plate, Jewellery, Precious Stones Bought for Cash" and in gold lettering on the first floor windows passers-by are told that C.B Vaughan is a goldsmith, diamond merchant, jeweller and silversmith. There is no mention of him being a pawnbroker. In 1911 Vaughan, describing himself as a Diamond Merchant, lived with his family and three servants in the country at Tonbridge in Kent in a detached house in a major

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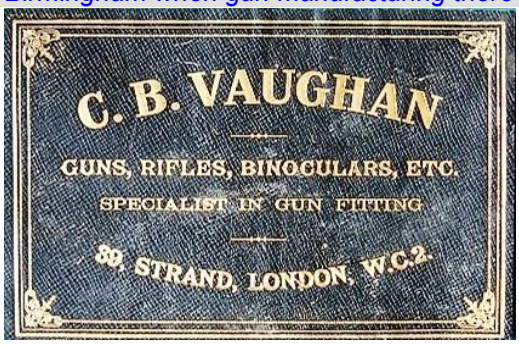
thoroughfare in the town opposite the church. From there he could have travelled up to London every day by train to emerge at Charing Cross Station a few yards from his shop.

John recalled Vaughan's showroom in the late 30s having a glass fronted display cabinet, about 5 feet wide, with guns stored vertically five rows deep. It was filled entirely with Wilkes guns. The salesmen sometimes rubbed the colour hardening of guns with a little with wire wool to give the guns, which were nearly all new, a slightly second-hand look – apparently they sold better. Vaughan charged more for a new Wilkes gun than the maker did.

The relationship with Vaughan, which we will encounter frequently in the chapters of this book, was to continue for almost sixty years. We know a good deal about the scale of Vaughan's business with Wilkes, and although it is unlikely that he used them exclusively, Wilkes does seem to have been a favoured supplier. In 1936, for example, trade with Vaughan was 60% of Wilkes turnover. Mr C.B. Vaughan had three guns made by Wilkes for his personal use, and it was to Vaughan that Wilkes went for a loan to allow him to set up a new business making guns in Birmingham when gun manufacturing there collapsed immediately after the First War.



Typical Vaughan trade label often fitted in cases that were sold with a second-hand weapon.

Vaughan's retailing activities for Wilkes ended during the Second War and although small volumes of repair work for Vaughan and two other dealers continued for a few years afterwards, this died out in the early 1950s. Vaughan left the property in the Strand around 1944 after 113 years at the address, moving to nearby 33 Bedford St, the firm becoming C.B.Vaughan (Guns) Ltd around this time. Vaughan himself died in Dorset in 1946 at the age of 72, leaving an estate valued at £45,000. The business continued after his death, subsequently being sold to Moss Bros, the outfitters who moved into the address and who continued to use the Vaughan trading name until 1967. They then absorbed its activities fully, setting up their own gun room – an enterprise that was to be short lived. In 1948, B.Tennant started to trade as a dealer from the 39 Strand address. He carried on until around 1957. He too used Wilkes as trade gunmaker although volumes of business were small compared to those of the previous occupant.

Charles B Vaughan performed a unique and now largely forgotten service to the gun trade in the first half of 20th century by providing a clearing house for the significant numbers of second-hand arms coming to the market, a role now performed more by the auction houses than by dealers. Although Vaughan's name is rarely encountered on guns, Wilkes made up just a few that bore his name, it is quite commonly seen on the labels of gun cases, usually indicating that gun inside was one of the many that once passed through his hands.

Gunmaker to the Trade

We have seen how the Wilkes business involved the making and sourcing from the trade of guns and rifles bearing the Wilkes name, and how these were sold selectively to retail customers but mainly through dealers. There was another enduring aspect of the business which was to fluctuate in significance over the years, that of being a gunmaker to the trade; undertaking repairs, refurbishments and new builds for other makers in London. The earliest surviving business card of John Wilkes has him promoting himself in this capacity. It was a capability that probably contributed more than any other to the strength of the relationships with Vaughan and Whistler. The dealers needed access to workshops that could perform repairs and alterations on the arms passing through their hands. Wilkes sought to provide this service. The earliest ledgers from just before the 1914 war are day books that record repair work and sales to these dealers – each having their own book. Vaughan's business was such that on occasion three or four jobs were

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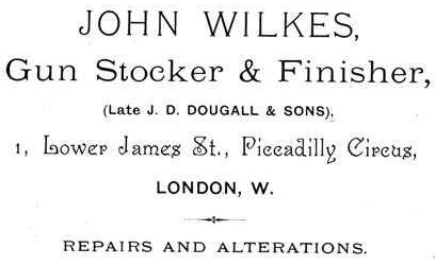
brought into Wilkes every day. In 1933, a year when sales of new guns to Vaughan were in a trough, this one dealer's business still accounted for over 50% of Wilkes turnover, more than 80% of that coming from repairs and alterations. So whilst Wilkes needed the dealers to sell his guns, the dealers needed him to do their repairs. The trade work was not confined to just dealers – right up to 1990 there would be a steady supply of trade work coming from many of the London makers.


JOHN WILKES,
Gun Stocker & Finisher,
(Late J. D. DOUGALL & SONS),
1, Lower James St., Piccadilly Circus,
LONDON, W.
REPAIRS AND ALTERATIONS.

John Wilkes' trade business card from the late 1890s.

Periodically Wilkes would also buy and sell guns and they also offered a repair and refurbishment work as a service to retail customers, but these activities, although going on throughout the firm's lifetime, were not to become a significant contributor to the bottom line of the business until the 1960s.

The London gun trade operated as a tight knit community, cooperation being more common than rivalry, the latter when it surfaced tending usually to be muted and discreet. But there were exceptions and the reaction of other gunmakers to John Wilkes' new business was not universally welcoming. William Jackman Jeffery, who had worked in the front shops of several firms, had set up on his own about five years earlier than Wilkes. He too sourced much of his production from Birmingham, and after the turn of the century was alerting potential customers in his press advertising to the perils of patronising "back street gunmakers". Wilkes were by then selling significant numbers of large calibre double rifles in direct competition with Jeffery, who had sought to differentiate themselves by making a number of significant contributions to the development of these rifles. When in 1909 they introduced the .404 rimless cartridge, John Wilkes sent his son Jack to Jeffery's shop with a prepared script. Jack was not known in the Jeffery shop, and was told by his father to say "I am from John Wilkes, can you let me have a box of .404 ammunition?" It was common practice for the London makers to make trade sales to one another of commodities like ammunition and accessories. The shop manager on receiving this request turned to the ammunition cabinet and opened it, but then asked Jack to repeat where he was from. On hearing the confirmation, he slammed the cabinet shut and said "John Wilkes gets **nothing** out of this shop." When he reported back to his father, John was unsurprised. He didn't want the ammunition; he just wanted to test how deep the animosity to his firm was.

There is an ironic postscript to this story. In the late 1920s Jeffery, after two changes of proprietorship within the family, had moved to Golden Square, just a few yards from John Wilkes original "back street" shop. They were then in need of Wilkes' services as a trade gunmaker. Although volumes of business were relatively small in the early thirties, they were to pick up during the second war and were to stay at high levels as long as Jeffery remained in business as a separate entity. W.J. Jeffery would end up being John Wilkes' largest trade customer of all time.

The Start of the Family Business

Having covered the way in which the new John Wilkes business operated, we can now move on to look at what the firm was to do in the next 108 years. This falls naturally into several periods, in each of which the business has a distinct characteristic. The ability to adjust the balance of work from one period to the next has allowed the family firm to make enough profit to survive during a century where most of their contemporaries at the outset were to fail at some point. The founding John Wilkes was himself the third identifiable generation in the trade. The firm was then to pass successfully to two further generations and thereby stay within the exclusive

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ownership and control of the family. The ability to keep both the interest in the business alive within the family and to manage its direction free from external interference have been critical factors in the firm's success.

The periods that are described in the following chapters are.

- 1895 to 1914. The period of highest production where the firm's reputation was established.

- 1915 to 1927. The First World War and the post war hiatus, the end of the Birmingham arm of the business and the succession from John Wilkes to his sons Jack and Tom.

- 1928 to 1939. Surviving the Great Depression. The early years in Beak Street, and the move to retail sales and London made guns.

- 1940 to 1949. War work and its immediate aftermath

- 1950 to 1967. The crisis in the trade, making for the trade and the succession to the next generation, again named John and Tom.

- 1968 to 2003. Another crisis, buying and selling and a return to gunmaking in London. Closing down.

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Victorian Tools and Materials

This page shows a small selection of the tools and materials that would have been in Wilkes' workshop in Lower James Street in the 1890s, and which were still in their workshop in 2003.

Leg vice. Last used by Wilkes in the back shop in 79 Beak St

Cast bench horse (rest)

Forged brace with chuck for holding square shank tools

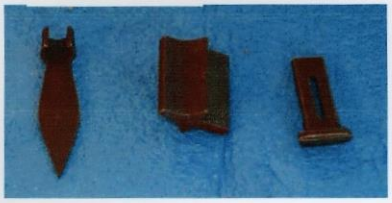
Brace tools. From top: D-reamer, hexagonal finishing reamer, U-section wood boring bit.

Hammer gun crosspins. A forging above & a rough machining below

Extractor forging

Cutters for making pins. The cutter is held in the vice by the tab and the workpiece is turned in it with a brace. Several cutters would be used to make a single pin.

Machining for a screw grip boxlock. The slots are mostly only roughly cut leaving the actioner much work to do



1850s era forgings; l to r, percussion tailpipe, loop and slide nail

Machining for a large bore flat back sidelock. Strap is turned up to allow access to the action back for drilling firing pin holes. The bolt slot is just a row of drilled holes at this stage.

Length behind detail. Sprung rollers hold the moving arm square and steady, with lock screw for making off to a particular length.

Stock lengths were measured with great precision with a "length behind"

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Chapter 4 – Gunmaking 1895 to 1914

The period of 20 years between the start of John Wilkes' new business and the First World War was to be one of the busiest and most significant in the firm's history. During this time, as the firm established itself, they produced an enormous variety of guns, they moved into game rifle making and they started the change from the heavy damascus barrelled guns that had typified late Victorian tastes to lighter and small bore guns with steel barrels. The chapter that follows contains many details that map these changes. The records that survive show that the annual rate of production of John Wilkes guns and rifles remained roughly steady throughout this period and at higher levels than were to be achieved at any time subsequently in the firm's history. In common with many other makers, firearms were not always sold in the order in which they were recorded in the register. To smooth out the inconsistencies that this creates in the annual totals, five year averages of annual production and annual retail sales are as follows: -

Period	Average production per year	Average retail sales per year
1895 - 1899	92	17
1900 - 1904	90	10
1905 - 1909	81	8
1910 - 1914	123	8

Although initially most of the production was guns, after the turn of the century there was a growing number of double rifles, mostly in the larger calibres, in the mix. Wilkes gradually focused on a small number of Birmingham makers to supply the majority of the production sourced from there. After an initial surge in retail selling he settled down to selling only about 10% of his production retail, the reminder going through dealers. Repairs and refurbishments for the trade must have been picking up during the period because when records begin for the dealer Whistler in 1911, jobs are coming in from them alone at the rate of 10 a month, albeit with most of them being charged out at only a few shillings each.

There is also one other surviving record from the period. In 1948, the then owner of a pair of guns wrote to John Wilkes asking for details of their original manufacture. The register, unusually for this period, has no entry against these guns and records the numbers as unused, so whoever was dealing with the query then must have gone back to the original invoice book, which contained an indexed set of copy invoices for all retail customers in the period roughly between 1911 and 1915. This book could not have been returned to the shelf with its contemporaries, because unlike them it still survives, with the letter containing the query tucked in its pages. This book provides a very informative snapshot of business towards the end of this initial period, not just identifying the prices charged for new guns and rifles, but also showing the considerable volumes of business that were generated by the servicing and repair of Wilkes guns already sold.

The First 25 Guns

The first page in the Register starts at a gun numbered 4010, and apart from one out of sequence entry for 4006 fitted in at the bottom of the same page, all guns there recorded have numbers higher than this. I have never seen any Wilkes gun coming up for sale that was unambiguously attributed to our John Wilkes with a number earlier than this, so I was happy to assume that gun number 4010 marked the start of Wilkes' business. The Invoice Book mentioned above contains,

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however, a bill for the conversion of gun number 4009 to ejector, work done in August 1912 for £7/10/0. So we are thrown back to the point made earlier that there was in all probability some overlap in the transition from Dougall's numbering to Wilkes'.

Guns 4010 to 4020 were all supplied by John Harper. All had damascus barrels, the first seven being sidelocks and the last four A&D boxlocks, three of the latter being ejectors. Only two of the boxlocks have retail customers recorded against them the remainder having no customers shown. It is assumed that the latter were sold via dealers, but until this starts to be recorded explicitly around 1900, there is some uncertainty on this point.

John Harper

Of all the Birmingham makers that supplied work to John Wilkes, none made a greater contribution than did the firm of John Harper. Harper undertook work for Wilkes in a period of almost seventy years, but the great majority of it was between 1895 and 1940. He supplied finished and part finished guns and rifles, both Birmingham and London proved, and undertook repair work for them ranging from fitting simple replacement parts through to major reconstructions. Of the 3200 or so guns and rifles that bear the Wilkes name, at least 1340 were made wholly or in part by Harper. A measure of the quality of his work is that Wilkes guns that were made up by Harper are quite frequently offered for sale today by dealers as best London guns at prices to match. Unlike some members of the Birmingham trade who are now entirely anonymous because their work was always sold bearing another's name, guns bearing the name of Harper are occasionally encountered.

Like the Wilkes family, the Harpers had many members active in the trade in and around Birmingham through several generations. Douglas Tate in his book on Birmingham Gunmakers[24] identifies a number of these, but the availability of census records does allow a little better understanding of the familial ties between those with the same name trading at different times and from different addresses.

The firm of John Harper is recorded in directories at various addresses between 1902 and 1976, initially at 144½ Steelhouse Lane until 1914, then at 28 Whittall Street to 1939, then at 3 Price Street until 1953 and finally at 63 Price Street. As Wilkes was buying significant numbers of finished firearms from Harper from 1895 onward, and possibly before that when he was with Dougall, it would be helpful to trace Harper's firm back before its first directory entry to see if any light can be shed on the origins of the association with Wilkes, which must have been quite strong given that the latter's early business was very dependent on Harper's ability to deliver both volume and quality.

In 1861 Thomas Harper, then aged 47, was trading as a gun lock maker in Willenhall Street, Darlaston, Staffordshire, the same town where the older Joseph Wilkes was born. His son John, then aged 20, was living at the same address and in the same trade. Brown[8] shows a lock maker by the name of William Watson Harper trading from this street at about this time, perhaps a relative? By the next census in 1871, John Harper, now 30, has married with a daughter aged 4 and a son, also called John, and then aged 2. Significantly he has moved with his family to Aston, closer to Birmingham, and is now a gun action filer, responding perhaps to the same appeal that, ten or more years previously, had drawn Edwin Hodges in London into this new and fast growing branch of the trade. We know from the account of his grandson that after leaving Darlaston he worked for a time in the 1860s in the Tower ordnance factory in Bagot Street and then for Pryse & Redman at 84 Aston Road. We can recall that John Wilkes' uncle, who was 5 years older than John Harper, was also a gunmaker working in Aston at this time and employing 3 men and 2 boys, one of whom may have been his young nephew John. It is possible that the connection between Harper and the Wilkes was established then, possibly with the intermediation of the uncle. By 1895 Uncle John was nearing retirement and it could be that Harper was somehow

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involved in his business. That would certainly explain why, when the London business started, so much of its work was placed with Harper, but this is conjecture.

By the next census in 1881, Harper is a gun action maker and has two further sons, Joseph and George, and another daughter, none of the children yet being at work. By 1891 John now aged 50 has the same trade as before, but is now an employer, and sons John, then aged 22 and George, 17, are employees in the same trade, presumably working for their father. Ten years further still and John Harper is a gunmaker, and an employer living in a house with a name rather than a number in Station Road, Wylde Green, near Sutton Coldfield, about five miles northeast of the city, with a domestic servant, both John and George having by now left home. John junior had not moved far, he was living in the same road as his father and was also by now a gunmaker but still an employee at the age of 32. The younger John was married to Betsy, whose maiden name coincidentally was Wilkes. She was the daughter of Enoch Wilkes, a nut and bolt manufacturer in Darlaston, and very possibly a distant relative of the older Joseph Wilkes. The street in which the two John Harpers and their families lived still has some prosperous Victorian houses, suggesting that by 1901 both father and son were doing quite well.

Harper's grandson would later recall [21] how both his father and grandfather had made hammer actions from forgings without any machining, cutting out the action slots by successive use of drill, chisel and file to create the rough slot, finishing this to exact width and shape by using a series of drifts of gradually increasing size. The knuckle was then shaped with a file with the action in a jig that rotated around a pin through the pilot crosspin hole, the same hole being used as the axis for rotating a drift that cut the circle joint.

By the 1911 census, John senior was still running the business. It appears that he died in 1915, the firm then passing into the hands of his son. A third generation, a son John Norman Harper, was born to John junior in 1903. John Harper junior died in April 1937 at the age of 69, leaving a significant estate of almost £10,000. The firm then passed into the hands of his son, of whom there is a photo taken in the 1970s in Tate's book [24]. The firm of John Harper seems to have ceased trading around 1976, and John Norman Harper died in 1981.

The younger John Harper, with whom Jack Wilkes traded extensively in the 1920s and 1930s pictured about 1930.

John Norman Harper was interviewed by Hinchley[21] in April 1951, their conversation revealing much of the woes of the gun trade in this period. Harper recounted that in the late 30s, the firm had been making ten A&D guns a week supplying several London makers including Churchill. These customers were very price sensitive in the 20s and 30s, many being willing to switch makers in the Birmingham trade for a price difference of as little as 5 shillings per gun. He singled Halliday out as particularly unreasonable in his demands of the Birmingham trade, but there were larger makers in Birmingham who were equally miserly in their dealings with the smaller firms, both Greener and Ford getting mention in this respect.

As we shall see Wilkes was to do steady business with Harper up to the Second World War, but after that it became more spasmodic, and letters on file from the 1950s suggest that by then Harper, in common with many others, was finding difficulty in turning work around on time. After that contact between the two firms dwindled.

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The Register next shows four steel barrelled A&D boxlock guns, two of which have ejectors, all with a screw grip and finished by "W&S". The screw grip was a patent of Webley and Brain dating from 1882, and the W&S here refers to P.Webley & Sons; the firm of Webley & Scott, the more obvious interpretation of the abbreviation, not being founded until 1897. This mechanism, in which the Scott spindle pivots in a bush coarsely threaded into the detonating of the action was fitted at this time with a third bite in the bush which engaged an extension on the barrels, hence the screw grip. It was to be synonymous with Webley made guns but machinings for screw grip actions were available more widely in the trade. There was one of these in Wilkes stock of machinings in 2003 and they also had a tap for cutting the coarse thread for the bush. The last of these guns, 4024, was sold retail to a customer in Coventry. It was to come back in 1911 for overhaul by which time it had changed hands and was now owned by a customer living in Ireland. For whatever reason, having guns made up by Webley was an experiment that was not repeated in a hurry. With the exception of two other guns in the next decade, it would be almost 40 years before significant numbers of finished firearms were sourced from them, starting in 1934. But the story of the John Wilkes business was to interweave with that of Webley several times before then.

The next entry in the register is a block of four A&D non-ejector guns with damascus barrels, finished by the unidentified "TP", and these were followed by four more A&D guns from Harper, three of which were ejectors and one of these had steel barrels. The last entry on the page is 4006, an A&D non ejector with a half pistol hand and an unnamed finisher. Five of the twenty four guns on the page were marked down to retail customers.

I have covered this first page of the register in detail, because it establishes the way in which production was to be organised and recorded throughout the Edwardian period – guns and later rifles being supplied in blocks with similar specifications from a particular finisher. In the period covered by this first phase of the business to 1914 there are some 88 pages of the register. On some of these the amount of data recorded is, as on the this first page, somewhat sparse; on others, particularly after the turn of the century, there is so much data recorded on some of the pages that they can only be decoded with difficulty. It would clearly be neither practical nor interesting to go through the register page by page. Instead in the pages that follow we will pick out particular guns and rifles of interest or new features in production as they are encountered.

Some Significant Victorian Guns and Stories

Numbers 4038 and 4039 were a pair of damascus barrelled boxlock guns sold on 1st September 1895 to Major E.A.Burnell-Milnes who lived in St James's Place, close to Dougall's old shop. They were finished by John Wilkes personally and described as "Highest" quality, a Dougall inherited description used for his best guns and rifles. This customer also had a pair of Dougall guns, 3944 and 4104 which came back for overhaul along with the Wilkes guns in 1911. The Dougall guns must have had some use by then because a few months later they were taken back in to have all new inside work fitted to the actions – a very major repair that cost £2/10/0 per gun. The Wilkes guns came in again the following year 1912 for an annual check, and during the season that followed, Burnell-Milnes also bought some 3000 cartridges from Wilkes, the retail price then being £5/5/0 per thousand. All of these were sent by rail freight to the keepers at estates in Kent and Norfolk, packing and carriage being charged extra.

This second page of the register records the first guns in the smaller bores, one 16 and one 20 bore. On the next page are three more guns London finished by Wilkes, all boxlocks; a single gun with interceptors and a pair of damascus barrelled boxlocks, 4060 and 4061 sold in September 1895 to a customer in Langham Street, north of Oxford Circus. The No2 gun of this

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pair came up for sale at Holts in 1999 having been re-barrelled, the original 30" damascus barrels having been replaced by 28" steel at some point, and the gun having seen a lot of use. At this period about a third of the guns sold had steel barrels.

An early example of a Holloway made gun. 4081, a 12 bore non-ejector, was sold in 1896 and originally fitted with damascus barrels

Also on this page are the first guns recorded as finished by "H&C", which is for Holloway & Co. The abbreviation changes at some point to "H&Co" and then quite abruptly to "H&N" in 1909, which was the date when Thomas Naughton took over the firm and changed its name to Holloway & Naughton. The history of this firm has been very comprehensively described by Douglas Tate[24], and doesn't need repeating here. Wilkes was to use Holloway & Co for about a third of his guns in the late 1890s; there was then a lull during which they supplied occasionally, followed by a period between 1909 and the War when they supplied approaching half of the firearms sold. There was then a significant lull, Wilkes returning to H&N briefly in the early twenties and using them spasmodically through to the early thirties. In all, Holloway & Co and Holloway & Naughton finished just over 600 Wilkes guns, the first in 1895 and the last in 1931. The separate firm of G&S Holloway did not have any significant dealings with John Wilkes.

A typical Wilkes rib inscription from the Edwardian era

Some sportsmen in those days made heavy use of their guns, for example one of the earliest Holloway & Co finished guns was 4074, a 12 bore A&D ejector with damascus barrels and bright finish sold to a customer in Hampstead in late 1895. By early 1911 this was now in the hands of a major in the 12th Regiment living in Suffolk, who brought it in for renovation including repairs to the barrels, re-jointing and the fitting of a new safety slide costing in total £2/10/0. Just over a year later it was back to have "bad dents" to the barrels repaired, the ribs re-laid, and again a complete overhaul, this time costing £2/15/0.

The great majority of guns made at this time were 12 bore A&D boxlocks, but 4091/2 were a pair of Harper finished sidelock ejectors indicated by the word "Rogers" in the System column, referring to the J.T. and J. Rogers patent No 397 of January 1881 covering a mechanism that cocked the locks on opening by means of lifters pivoted in the bar of the action that engage in the knuckle of the fore end iron[12]. Although the patent expired in 1895, the term "Rogers" was used generically to describe any lifter cocked sidelock in Wilkes records and in the trade at large. These particular examples were engraved with fine rose and scroll but, in common with other

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maker's guns of the period, were not stocked to the fences. The no 2 gun of this pair was in the Sotheby's auction at Gleneagles in August 2004.

A few numbers further on were three pairs of boxlocks with "L finish" against them in the register. One of these pairs was to come back for a complete rebuild in 1911 before being dispatched to a Lieutenant in the 29th Punjabis in the Indian Army in Baluchistan. A good proportion of Wilkes customers were in Military service in various parts of the Empire, and a high proportion of arms that came in for repair were returned to their owners via shipping agents.

A recently refinished Rogers action gun, 4480 was supplied by Holloway & Co in 1899. In the register its boring is described as 12½ & 13 ½ (¼ & ¾choke). The gun has a flat back action and backwork locks with interceptors.

We shall see that, in the 1930s, it would be Wilkes' practice to supply to the Birmingham based finishers some of the component parts for better quality guns. This seems to have been the case in the early years as well. Guns finished by both Holloway and Harper are shown in the register as having barrels made by others; some by Squires and others by "HRH". Frank Squires was a leading outworker barrel filer to the London trade but I have not been able to trace the barrel filer referred to as HRH.

Frank Squires

Frank Squires was a barrel filer who worked according to Nigel Brown's research[7] from several addresses in Soho from 1884 onwards. Born in Clerkenwell in 1857, he was the son of Henry Squires, also a barrel filer, who had a workshop at 4 George Yard in Wardour Street until 1882. Frank's first premises were at his father's trade address, moving to 4 Dansey Yard in 1886 and then to 82 Berwick Street in 1900 where Brown has him listed until 1915.

Of all the gunmaking trades, barrel making was one of the most difficult to accommodate in a small workshop shared with other trades. Boring benches required space and a motive power source with noisy line shafting and belts, the furnace for brazing the barrels together generated heat and the whole process of finishing the inside and outside of the barrels covered everything in a film of black oil and emery. The larger makers' factories had barrel filer's shops where this equipment was concentrated, but for the makers who made in smaller numbers it was a long established practice to buy in barrels from specialist filers who would make up a pair of tubes to specification and then, once they had been fitted in to the action and the gun is in a shooting state, take them back for fine boring and regulation. These filers worked in shops equipped for their trade.

In the 1890s and the period up to the 1914 war Squires had a reputation for making some of the best barrels available in London, and he was used by many of the top makers with limited workshop facilities, including Boss, who regularly invited him to their annual dinner. His barrels are usually identifiable by his father's stamp mark HS in front of the flats. In both 1901 and 1911 census returns Squires describes himself as an employer so clearly had men working for him at that time. Wilkes had several best guns fitted with barrels supplied by Squires in the period up to 1915. Squires was unmarried and lived with a younger sister and a brother who worked in another trade, so there was no immediate family to succeed to the business. On 5th May 1920 Frank Squires committed suicide on Hampstead Heath at the age of 63 by shooting himself with a Belgian pistol. He appears to have had money worries possibly caused by the decline in business during the war; he left an estate of little more than £100. More than half a century later, John Wilkes, when recounting this tragedy which occurred four years before he was born, would focus as much of his remorse on Squires' choice of instrument as on the event itself.

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It is not clear what happened to Squires' business beyond 1915, when it was last recorded in trade directories and especially so after his death. Both John and Tom Wilkes remembered visiting in the late 30s a barrel filing shop in Berwick Street that was barely 3 minutes' walk from 79 Beak St, and which they referred to as Squires' shop. They remembered several of the barrel filers that Wilkes used before and immediately after the second War working there, notably Harry Wheeler and George Lane. It seems likely therefore that someone took over the running of the shop, perhaps renting out space in it to freelance barrel filers who traded on their own account with the gunmakers that used their services. This may account for why there is no entry in the directories. There are certainly no references to Squires in Wilkes surviving books after about 1915, but there are accounts from various individual barrel filers who the Wilkes remember as working in that shop.

Squires' shop was also the site of the last example of a now dead gunmaking skill. John could recall the last cockfiler (also referred to as a percussioner) in the London trade who had a bench there. This trade had the origins of its unusual name in the matchlock era of Tudor times. In the early breechloading era it was the cockfilers that produced the elegant hammers, each one made from a clumsy looking forging transformed with files, drifts and cutters into the strong, complex and precisely matching shapes that added so much to the appearance of the arms to which they were fitted. They were true specialists; making and fitting hammers was all they did, guns normally being sent to them after stocking and before the finisher started work. By the 1930s the main employment for the sole survivor of the trade would have been making replacements. He charged 10 shillings to make and fit a best hammer. Although hammer guns are enjoying something of a revival at present, the entire resources of the NC machine tool industry will be struggling to match the strength and elegance of these handmade hammers. The latter were all made to the gun and are all slightly different, but in modern hammer guns the hammers are all exactly the same – the gun has to be made to fit the hammers.

Wilkes' first rifle was 4122. The details are sparse; it was a top lever hammerless non-ejector .500 black powder rifle with a cheek piece, apparently sold retail as an address is written in the register barely legibly, but no customer name. The finisher was TP. Subsequently far more details would be recorded about rifles, details of sighting and cartridge for example – but this first instance is missing all of those.

The next two entries 4123/4 were a pair of unexceptional boxlocks, by the same unidentified finisher. These were still in the hands of the original customer when one of them came in for cleaning in 1914, and they were still together as a pair in their original oak and leather case when they were sold at Sotheby's in 1998. Despite one of them having been sleeved and the other having worn out barrels they sold over estimate at £900.

A pair of guns 4129/30 are recorded as finished by Holloway & Co but have "London finish" marked against them –suggesting they were sent to London in the white. 4143 was a "Highest" quality boxlock finished by John Wilkes personally and sold to a customer in 1896 who gave his club in St James' Street as his address, the gun still being in his possession when it came in for cleaning and storage 20 years later. 4144 was a Birmingham finished sidelock that came up for sale at Christie's in 1998, by then having been sleeved. It still made £700 against an upper estimate of £400.

A pair of boxlock guns 4154/5 were finished by Harper, with numbers 1 & 2 in gold – these are the first Birmingham finished guns recorded as "LP" in the register indicating they were London proved, meaning that Harper would have sent them to the London Proof House when in the barrel and action state. There was an extra charge for this service but it was clearly important if London based makers wanted to give customers the impression that their guns were made in the capital.

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They were also marked as London scroll engraved with Wilkes' name inlaid in gold on the actions.

4162 is a .577/12 bore hammer cape rifle, finished by TP for which the entry in the System column curiously is "Lefaucheux". This was the single bite rotary underlever action used on early pinfires, which was rapidly eclipsed by the Jones double bite underlever which was far stronger. It is certain that a rifle would be built on the latter action in the 1890s, so this entry is indicative of the jargon that Wilkes used at the time, the older name being used incorrectly to refer to the Jones underlever. Writers in recent years have successfully re-established the reputation of Henry Jones as the inventor of one of the most important actions of the period, giving him recognition that was denied to him by the trade until close to the end of his life, when at the age of 100 in 1911, he was given a gratuity of 21 gold sovereigns. As this entry demonstrates, up to that point the trade had forgotten Jones. For Wilkes to have done so is particularly surprising as he had worked in Hodges's workshop for several years, the same shop that had turned out hundreds of the best examples of the Jones action that were ever made.

The difficulty that tradesmen could encounter getting paid for their work is exemplified by the story of 4191/2, a pair of unexceptional boxlock guns. These were sold in 1896 and still in the hands of the original Somerset owner in March 1911 when they came back for a thorough overhaul. They were returned in the autumn of that year and an account for the work totalling £3/15/6 submitted, and a reminder sent again in the January of 1912. One of the guns came back for minor repairs later that year, the account for the earlier work still being unpaid. The cost of that work was added to the outstanding invoice making a total owing of £4/8/0. After the gun had been returned again in September, an invoice for this amount was sent on 31st December of 1912, and again on 26th February, 24th June, 29th September and 31st December 1913, and on 28th February, 30th March and 30th April of 1914. Thereafter the debt was transferred to another ledger so the outcome remains a mystery.

4196 was one of a pair of steel barrelled boxlock ejectors made by Holloway and sold in 1896. The gold naming is original.

4286 is recorded as a rebounding back action hammer 12 bore gun with top lever and is shown as a "Keeper Gun" suggesting it was fairly basic. This gun and one other were finished by Holloway. Another finisher, referred to as GS supplied a further 18 of them at around the same time in 1898. There is also a single barrel 16 bore finished by Harper on the same page. 4331 was unusual, a double barrel 8 bore hammer gun with 26" barrels and weighing 17lbs 2oz. It is recorded as a "Lefaucheux underlever" showing that Wilkes was consistent in his use of this term to refer to the Jones action. This gun was finished by Harper in June 1898. A couple of pages later is a similar steel barrelled 8 bore 4362 that was sold in November of the same year.

4334 was a "Highest" quality sidelock, a top lever ejector with steel barrels made by Squires and finished by Holloway in 1898 for a Captain Levinge of the Norfolk Regiment. This gun came up for sale at Christie's in December 1972, when second-hand gun prices were moving up very rapidly. It sold for 820 guineas (£861), an extraordinarily high price at the time

232 A 12-BORE SIDELOCK EJECTOR GUN BY J. WILKES, No. 4334, full bold foliate scroll engraving on a hatched ground, well-figured walnut stock—*weight* 6*lb.* 7½*oz.*, 14⅜*in. stock*, 29*in. barrels, approx.* ¼ *and* ⅝ *choke*, 2½*in. chambers, nitro proof;* in a leather case

The Christies catalogue entry for gun 4334. Auction catalogues in the early 1970s were rather drab, lacking the colour photographs that are normal today.

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for a gun of this age and provenance, especially so since the barrels appeared to have been shortened by an inch to 29". Otherwise it appeared to be in good original condition. The next gun in the register 4335 is of the same quality also with Squires barrels, but of damascus, and this time a side lever non-ejector, possibly the only example with this lever work on a double gun that Wilkes made.

4379/80 were a pair of Harper finished damascus barrelled sidelock ejectors sold in 1899 to General Sir Charles Parsons at an address in South Kensington. His telephone number is recorded in the register apparently entered contemporaneously with his address, a very early instance of this technology in a private home. It would be another 16 years before Mr Wilkes would have an instrument of his own on which to call Sir Charles. These guns come in the midst of an enormous block of Harper finished guns from 4367 to 4418 inclusive, the majority of which are 12 bore A&D ejectors. Against two of these, 4387 and 4388, is a note that these same numbers were also used on two non-ejector guns, the first instance of duplicate numbering recorded.

In the middle of a page containing more than usual medium to good quality guns sold in 1899 is an entry for 4436 which is recorded as a 20 bore with a customer name, but no address and no other details whatsoever. Exactly 100 years later, in September of 1999, this gun came up for sale at Christie's, by then fitted with new barrels by Westley Richards. From the catalogue description we discover that it was a sidelock ejector with a highly figured stock engraved with foliate strap work on a matted ground with fences relief engraved in a similar style. It sounds like it was a best gun. It made £4000, in the middle of the auctioneer's estimate. It must have left the shop before anyone could record any of its particulars.

Father and Son

About this time, it is more than likely that John Wilkes' eldest son who, although named John William was always referred to as Jack, will have joined him in the shop to begin learning the trade. He had been born in 1886. Nigel Brown[7] recounts the story of Jack sleeping as a young child, he would have been barely a year old, in a crib filled with heather in Dougall's shop in Bennett Street so that he could watch the procession for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee on 21st June 1887. He probably didn't start work until reaching the age of 14 in 1900, although as with Jack's sons, he would almost certainly have been gradually introduced to the business by his father some while before that.

Some evidence of Jack's arrival is provided by a change of handwriting in the register in 1900; the very formal and careful scroll with the heavy use of abbreviations of the first five years of business giving way to a less tidy and less meticulous approach to record keeping. Whilst John had been careful to complete a line of entries for each of the guns on the page, the new archivist makes much more use of dittos and other shorthand to reduce the amount of writing needed. But in the first few pages he does not use the abbreviations for the finishers – both Harper and Whitby being identified against a few guns. The abbreviations were to return a page or two later. Notwithstanding this there would be a gradual increase in the next few years in the type of data making its way into the registers. From 1900 onwards both sale date and trade customers were being recorded making it possible from then on to see clearly the role in the business played by Vaughan and Whistler.

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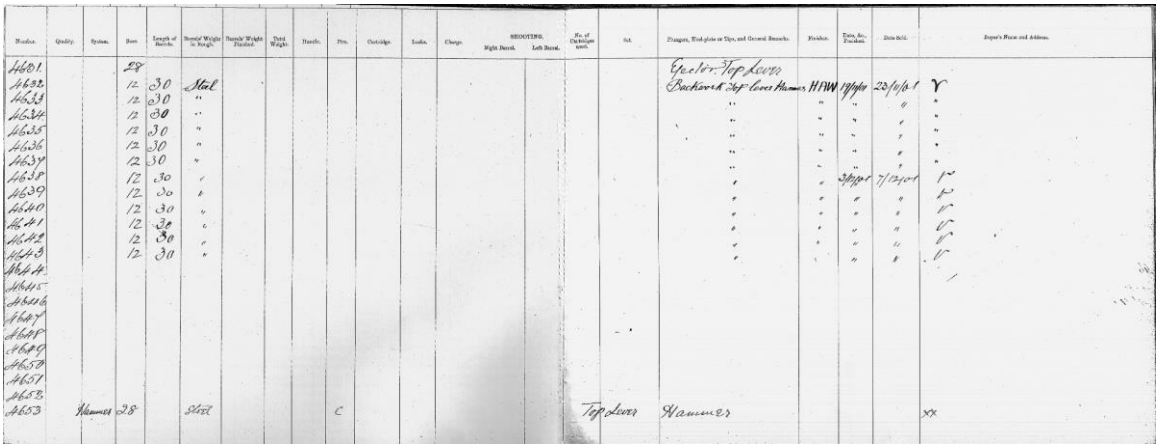

A sparsely completed page in the Register that dates from 1901, starting at gun number 4601. This is in Jack's handwriting. The guns recorded at the top of the page are all made by Whitby and sold to Vaughan.

Gun 4487 was quite unexceptional – a single barrelled 12 bore hammer gun – but it was the first in the register to be finished by HAW, supplied to Wilkes on 1st September 1899. This was the abbreviation initially used for Henry Albert Whitby. We know this because a few pages later the name Whitby is pencilled in instead of the abbreviation. In all he was to finish about 160 guns for Wilkes and most of them seem to be in the lower qualities. Whitby also made a second quality sidelock ejector 4529 with damascus barrels sold retail in September 1900. This gun came up for sale at a sale by Holt & Kidner at Lymington in Hampshire in 1997. By then this gun had two pairs of barrels, one of them sleeved. In a makers case it sold for £700.

Henry Albert Whitby

Henry Whitby was born into a family of gunmakers in the Aston area of Birmingham about 1846. His father Charles was a gun finisher as were his older brothers Joseph and Frederick; born respectively about 1840 and 1844. Whitby traded as a gunmaker initially around 1886 from an address in Lench Street and thereafter from about 1890 to 1912 at various addresses in Weaman Street. Whilst Henry describes himself in his census returns as an employer, his surviving brother Joseph remained a worker, so Henry seems to have been the more successful of the family commercially. Although guns bearing his name are occasionally encountered, there was one such in Holt's March 2011 sale; he seems to have operated mainly as a maker to the trade.

We do not know how the connection between Wilkes and Whitby was established; it may have been through John's uncle who was a contemporary in the Birmingham trade, and who also came from the suburb of Aston. It was, however, one that was to survive long after Whitby's death at the age of 67 in 1912. Whitby and his wife had no children of their own. When, in the 1880s both his older sister Emma and her husband died in rapid succession, Whitby and his wife adopted their three young sons, his nephews Henry, William and Roland Bloomer. They were all apprenticed to Whitby. Only one of these, the eldest Henry, appears briefly in Brown's records[8] as a finisher trading in Whittall Street around 1912. When Henry Whitby died, leaving a very modest estate valued at under £300, Roland Bloomer was the executor of his will. Roland by then was an actioner, and would become a leading light at Webley & Scott and a close friend of Jack Wilkes. We will learn more about him later in the Wilkes' story. It seems plausible that this friendship blossomed in the period between 1899 and 1912 when Whitby and his nephews were supplying guns to John Wilkes, where young Jack was learning the trade.

Another strand in the connection between the firms was to be found In the Beak Street workshop. Many of the specialist gauges and measuring tools that were in everyday use on the benches bore the stamp "G.F. Whitby". George Frederick Whitby, the son of Joseph, was

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another of Henry's nephews who also became a finisher. Born about 1861 he died in 1939. We know that G.F.Whitby was working in London as a finisher for James Lang in the late 1890s as he filed a provisional patent for a two-part ejector in 1897, and two years later was responsible for the design of Lang's patented single trigger[13]. After the furore surrounding H.J.Hussey's involvement in the firm, Whitby became Lang's workshop manager[20]. For a while in the early years of the 20th century, George Whitby traded under his own name from his home address in Cricklewood in North London; two guns bearing his name, with numbers in the range 100 to 110, having coming up for sale at auctions in the last 20 years. Thereafter his career becomes more difficult to trace. The Wilkes family believed that George Whitby was, for a time leading up to his retirement, an employee of theirs and that he left his tools behind when he finally gave up work. If so, we know he left their service before the ledgers start in 1927, when he would have been 66, as there is no record of him in them.

George Whitby's stamp on a length behind, now in Craig Whitsey's workshop in Arundel

Early 20th Century Gunmaking

Up to 1900 the vast majority of Wilkes production had been 12 bore guns with 30" barrels. There had been a few boxlock rifles made as well as a small number of small bore guns in 16, 20 and 28 bore, the last two usually fitted with 28" barrels. Damascus was very gradually giving way to steel and, by 1900, 12 bore guns with 28" barrels were starting to appear. From 1900 there would be a steady increase in the variety of firearms that Wilkes would turn out. In April 1901, Wilkes sold 6 hammer guns to Vaughan, all of them made up by Whitby. They were a mixed bag – two each single barrel guns in 16 bore and 20 bore, all with 30" barrels and two 28 bore double barrelled guns with 28" barrels. Later the same year Whitby made up ten back work top lever double hammer guns – all of which went to Vaughan.

On a page that records a group of unexceptional guns sold in late 1901 are three numbers 4617/8/9 bracketed together with the words "Bozard numbers" against them and no other details. These are possibly guns that Wilkes was having made up for the firm that had followed Dougall into the Bennett Street shop, which by then had moved again to Panton Street near Leicester Square. By 1901 Bozard & Co was on the verge of closing so it is possible that the guns for which these numbers were reserved were never made.

In early 1903 a block of six numbers from 4776 to 4781 were each used on two different guns. The register entry is confused here – Harper was the finisher on all six that were initially entered in the record, but alongside this entry are rather sparse and confusing details of the duplicates. Further down the page is another Harper gun, a 28" barrelled 12 bore A&D ejector described as "Featherweight" and noted as having a "top bottom rib". This highly descriptive terminology was always used by Wilkes, even a century later, to describe what other gunmakers referred to as a sunken or swamped rib. It meant what it said, that the sighting rib was of the same type as normally fitted underneath. This particular gun, 4791 was sold to a retail customer, but shortly after a group of six similar 12-bore guns 4818 - 23 were sold to Vaughan, and against these a weight was recorded in the register of 5lbs 10oz. This indicates that the drive towards lighter weights of gun was already underway at the turn of the century. Wilkes would continue to specialise in making lightweight boxlocks for the next 40 or more years usually with normal 2½" chambers and 28" barrels.

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Rifle production had been a small part of the business hitherto and the details recorded in the register on rifles that had been made were quite sparse, but around this time more attention was given to this aspect when they were made. For example, 4797 and 4798 were both Harper finished rifles that were sold to Vaughan on 16th March 2003. The register tells us they were Birmingham proved .450/.400 Nitro express 3¼" case A&D rifles with 26" steel barrels regulated for the 400 grain bullet and a charge of 60 grains of cordite. They were sighted for 100, 200 and 300 yards. They were top lever, fitted with a cross bolt and side wings and were non ejectors, with pistol grip stocks.

Just after these comes an entry for 4800, and A&D boxlock ejector gun that was sold to Vaughan, but in a different ink in the customer column is the name of the naval officer who bought the gun retail from Vaughan. Hammer guns made up quite a bit of production to meet the demand for lower cost at this time. Numbers 4851 to 4890 were a block of forty back work top lever 12 bore hammer guns all fitted with 30" steel barrels that all went to Vaughan in monthly tranches of 5 between May and December of 1903. All were supplied by Whitby. It would be interesting to know how many of these survive – it is likely that most were put to hard use.

There is then an interesting entry against 4897, a damascus barrelled AD top lever ejector that is marked as having been subsequently paired with 8010 and the pair being numbered 1 & 2 in gold when this was done. This first gun was sold retail in 1903. In the handwriting of new record keeper, the finisher is marked as "Self" – possibly the first gun to be finished by Jack Wilkes who would then have been 17 years old.

The last page of 4000 series firearms, all made in the closing months of the 1904 and early 1905 are typical of the period and of the Wilkes business ten years after it started. Twenty of those on the page were finished by Harper, no finisher being recorded against the other four. There are two best guns; 4977, a damascus barrelled sidelock fitted with a single trigger and 4989, a London proved top lever A&D with a point finish to the stock, a Boss pattern third bite engaging a concealed extension, and covered with fine scroll engraving. Both of these and three other lower quality guns on the page were sold retail. Sixteen other entries on the page, including three boxlock .450 cordite rifles, were sold to Vaughan, a 16 bore ejector gun and a .450/.400 rifle went to Whistler and one had no customer recorded. Of the twenty guns on the page, there were three in 16 and two in 20 bore, the remainder being 12s, and only three of the guns were ejectors, and just two fitted with damascus barrels. The last number on the page 4998 was used twice – on a .450 boxlock rifle and on a good quality 16 bore boxlock non ejector. The mistake here appears to have been Harper's as he is recorded as finisher for both.

Rifle production was becoming a much more significant part of the business and the types of action offered were diversifying. The next page has 11 rifles and 12 guns, and whilst the rifles continue for the most part to be doubles on boxlock actions, this page also has two "fallen (*sic*) block" single .400s and two sidelock single barrel .450s. All the rifles are again finished by Mr Harper, and the two that are sold retail have customers with shipping addresses in Uganda and British East Africa.

Early on in the life of his new business, John Wilkes had found time to finish a few best guns personally, but by 1905 he had not recorded himself as finisher on a gun for seven years. In 1905 he finished three best sidelocks, a singleton 5022 with Brazier locks that was sold to a customer living in Chelsea and a pair 5030/1 that were sold to Vaughan and that are shown as having been engraved, presumably on the barrels "Finished for C.B. Vaughan". These guns would still have had Wilkes' name on them so they would not have been masquerading as guns made by

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Vaughan. It may have been that Vaughan was trying a new approach to marketing higher quality guns. But on the next page is another pair of best guns 5061/2 that were again finished by Wilkes, but this time they are marked as being sold on 13th January 1906 to Mr C.B. Vaughan at his home address in Tonbridge in Kent. These were for Vaughan's personal use. Given that he would have known at first hand the guns of all the leading London makers, this choice of Wilkes to supply him with a pair of guns was a strong recommendation and perhaps also indicative of the strength of the ties between their two businesses. 18 months later another best sidelock, this time a 20 bore 5204 was made for Mr Vaughan personally.

5011 is a 28 bore non-ejector, made in 1905 by Harper and sold to Whistler. It has been extensively refurbished recently.

On the same page is 5186 a top lever 12 bore bar action hammer gun that is marked JW in the finisher column, the proprietor's abbreviation, but to the extreme left immediately next to the number the scribe has marked "Fathered". This indication that Mr Wilkes senior personally had worked on a gun was to appear from time to time for the next 20 years. It removes any doubt that it was now Jack that was keeping the register. Jack had improved the diligence with which he did this as around this time the pages start to become dense with information, each gun or rifle having all of its particulars individually recorded rather than the previous reliance on shorthand and dittos to achieve this.

In July 1908 an A&D top lever ejector 5275 in 12 bore was made that was unusual in that it was built on a Webley & Scott screw grip action with a third bite and finished by Frederick Hadfield of Whittall Street, one of very few guns that Wilkes took from this source. It also had the Vaughan's customer's name engraved on the coverplate. The following gun, also a 12 bore boxlock, was a Paradox rifle finished by Holloway and regulated for a 750 grain lead bullet. This was sold to Whistler, but the retail customer's name was also recorded in the register

5265 was made by Holloway & Co; a non-ejector 12 bore gun that was sold to Whistler in 1908. This is its stock, showing the quality of wood that Wilkes fitted to their mid-range production.

Holt's catalogue picture of the .410 with the broken stock

5280 to 5282 were three single barrel boxlock hammer .410s with side lever opening and octagonal breeches to the barrel that were made by Holloway and sold to Vaughan in 1909. One of these sold in 2010 at Holt's with a broken off stock for £70, way above estimate. On the same page are three guns, a 12 bore sidelock and two 16 bore boxlocks that were all sold to Floriano G de los Rios at an address in Barcelona. He was a dealer who would go on to buy several other Wilkes guns, usually requiring unusual bespoke features for his customers in

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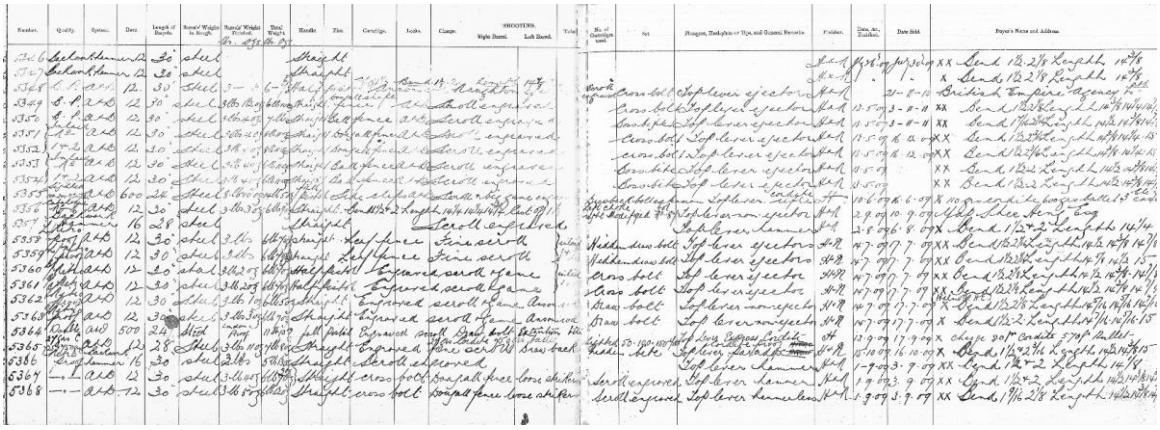
Spain. In the case of the two boxlocks 5292/3 this involved regulating for a particular nitro powder load, engraving the customer's initials on the levers and fitting sling swivels.

The entry for 5355 sits in the middle of an unusually dense page of records mostly relating to good quality A&D guns. Most of these have special ornamentation noted or extra specification such as loose strikers, Dougall pattern or leaf carved fences, or game scene engraving. Four of them are marked as pairs of guns and the fact some are London nitro proved is shown in the register. All these guns were from Holloway & Naughton, who by then had replaced Holloway & Co. But 5355 was from Harper; a top lever boxlock non ejector rifle with side clips and draw bolt extension, 24" barrels, engraved with big game and weighing 14lbs 5 oz. It was Wilkes' first .600 nitro express; sold to Whistler in June 1909.



A decade after the earlier page around 1911 there is much more data in the Register, almost too much to decipher. This page starts at 5346. 5355 is a .600 double rifle. The XX and X codes indicate sales to Vaughan and Whistler respectively. There are just two retail sales on the page

Big Game Rifle Maker

There were to be a further eight of these rifles in this calibre made, of which six were sold prior to the First World War; the remaining three being finished in 1922. All but the first went to Vaughan for sale. Fifty years later John Wilkes would sometimes claim that Wilkes made more rifles in .600 calibre than any other maker. He made this claim on the basis that Wilkes certainly did both make up themselves, or arrange the making of by others, rifles for London gunmakers that ended up bearing the name and number of the ultimate retailer.

Rifle making work for the trade over the lifetime of the Wilkes business exceeded their making of rifles under their own name. There are one or two documented examples in the surviving ledger from this early period and numerous recorded examples before and after the 1939-45 war. For example, in July 1913 Wilkes sold to Boss & Co a .450/.400 boxlock rifle, engraved but un-named, for £22/10/0; and in 1914 they sold to the same maker another similar calibre, un-named rifle followed, later in the year, by a .470 rifle named "John Robertson", the brand name used by Boss for guns below best quality, all three for the same price. When sales like this were made the gun or rifle had no entry in the Wilkes number register. Around this period Wilkes made up a Heeren falling block rifle for Thomas Bland that bore the latter's name, a fact that was only discovered when Wilkes re-barrelled it some 70 years later and then approached to Bland's for permission to put their name on the barrel. They also finished and proved a number of Mannlicher Schönauer rifles for George Gibbs at 35 Saville Row, but apart from these isolated

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cases, there is no reliable measure of the full amount of trade rifle making work that Wilkes undertook during this pre-First World War period.

Nor is there the evidence to support John's claim about the .600 rifles. The are nine .600s in Wilkes' register, and if some were made up for others, I cannot believe it would have been enough to take the total over Jeffery's reported[7] 32 double and 24 single .600s. This does not alter the fact that by the early years of the century, John Wilkes had become a significant maker of rifles. The production of rifles bearing Wilkes' own name peaked in the period between 1905 and 1914 during which time 145 rifles were made of which all but 40 were boxlock non-ejector doubles. Along with the .600 already mentioned, the .450/.400, .450 and .500 calibres were popular initially, the .470 gaining in popularity later in the period. The other 40 were bolt action rifles that were finished mostly by two makers that are identified only by the initials M and OW in the register. One of these, 5551 a sporting pattern, scroll engraved .303, was sold retail for £7/10/0 in February 1911.

Catalogue and Pricing

The only surviving catalogue produced by John Wilkes, and possibly the only one they ever published, dates from this period at Lower James Street. It is a quarto sized (approximately 11" x 9") booklet printed on white gloss paper of 20 pages in all, of which two are blank. Sadly it is undated, but the exclusive reference to nitro powders and regular mention of a choice between steel and damascus for barrels both suggest a date in the 1905-1910 range. Equally unfortunately there are no prices shown, customers are invited instead to contact Mr Wilkes for details of these. Like many catalogues of the time it is extensively illustrated with drawings of guns, cases and accessories. These illustrations were produced by printing blocks, usually of copper, most of which were made from engravings rather than prepared by photographic etching. Most of the printing blocks used depict guns with damascus barrels.

The cover of the catalogue features Wilkes' rarely encountered trade mark of a highly stylised and entwined J and W. The firm had a stamp to impress this on action flats and the like which was only occasionally used. The cover also makes very discrete reference to the former association with Dougall, suggesting that by the time it was printed Wilkes no longer felt the need to emphasise these credentials. After a brief introductory letter to the potential customer, the catalogue goes on to illustrate and describe three sidelock models, six boxlock models, two hammer guns and a boxlock double and a falling block single rifle.

The two best sidelock models are illustrated by two pictures of apparently the same un-named gun using the only two photo-etched blocks in the catalogue. It is quite clearly Robertson made, being identical in style to the pre-1900 flat backed Boss and even including a Boss single trigger. The engraving on this gun is of extraordinary quality and not at all in the normal Boss style. The ball and bead fences have the balls carved in relief, a style that is extended onto the lever and safety button, and the beads have had a line of minute balls carved on to them. Years later John Wilkes' grandson would recall having seen a used gun with this style of fence for sale in the window of Churchill's Orange Street shop, wondering as he looked at it how much time went in to getting the fences so perfectly finished.

Later guns in the catalogue are illustrated by hand cut blocks and here the printers have used blocks which were prepared in bulk for use by the trade, the maker's name being cut into the bar to match the catalogue in question. The resulting pictures, whilst broadly illustrative of what was available, probably bore only a passing a resemblance to the guns emerging from Wilkes' shop at the time. The catalogue is produced in full in Appendix 8.

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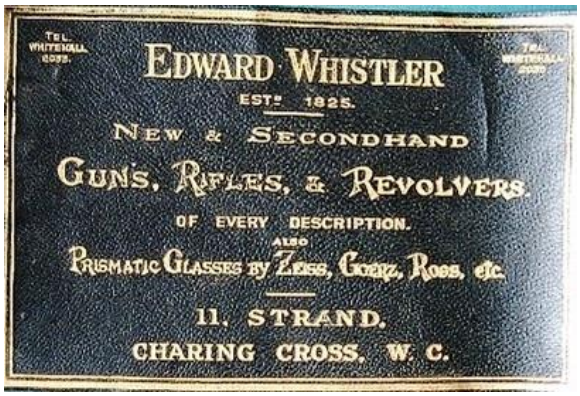
Wilkes pricing strategy throughout the firm's existence was to pass the benefits of their lower overheads on to their customers by offering them quality work at lower prices than their competitors. For their contemporary pricing we have to look elsewhere. The surviving 1910 invoice ledger provides some retail prices from the period. The firearms sold to Vaughan and Whistler, which were the majority, had their invoices copied into different ledgers.

Edward Whistler & Co

The firm of Edward Whistler was established in 1825 and traded from 11 Strand from 1847 or earlier to 1875, whereupon it became Edward Whistler & Co and traded at this same address until 1956, having become a limited company in 1949. 11 Strand was on the same southern side of the Strand as Vaughan, on the corner with Craven Street, the forecourt of Charing Cross Station and about 120 yards separating their two premises.

I have traced an Edward Whistler, a silversmith, born in 1821, who may have been the second generation of the family to run the business, but the family's connection with it may have ended with the name change in 1875. Early trade labels make it clear that the firm was trading as a dealer from the outset. Edward Whistler advertises, according to his trade label of the 1850s, a "Gun and Pistol Repository" offering "New and second hand guns by most approved London makers" as well as a "Large stock of second hand silver plate and jewellery". His customers are reminded that 11 Strand, Trafalgar Square is "Directly opposite the Golden Cross Hotel".



Whistler trade label. Early 20th Century.

Guns as well as rifles and pistols of various vintages appear on the market engraved with Whistler's name and address, but the firm never seems to have claimed to be a maker. Trade labels of different periods all focus on the firm being a dealer, the emphasis on silverware and jewellery of the 19th century being replaced by binoculars in the 20th. A label from the 1920s has the firm offering "Prismatic glasses by Zeiss, Goerz, Ross, etc" whilst featuring the fact that the firm offered "New & second-hand guns, rifles & revolvers of every description"

John Wilkes recorded selling over 310 guns and rifles to Whistler in the period between 1898 and 1937, about 10% of their production. Before complete sale records were kept in late 1900 there were probably 50 to 100 more that went through this same channel unrecorded. They also undertook repairs, renovations and alterations for them in sufficient volume to justify the keeping of a separate ledger recording invoices to the firm. This ledger ran for 26 years starting in January 1911 and ending at the end of 1936, at which point Whistler invoices were recorded in the ordinary invoice ledgers. The last repair work undertaken for Whistler was in 1956, the year the firm closed.

To understand how Wilkes' pricing was positioned in the market of the day, there follows a short account of the pricing levels of guns in the run up to the First World War. In the third volume of British Gunmakers[9], Brown records the retail prices of guns and rifles from various makers over time. Around 1910 a best, standard finish, sidelock, London gun was selling between £65 and £90 depending on the prestige of its maker, more if it were of presentation quality. Double rifles were typically £10 to £20 more than the equivalent gun. Good boxlock guns were priced between £30 and £50, with one or two makers, e.g. Greener and Westley Richards asking sidelock prices for their very best boxlocks.

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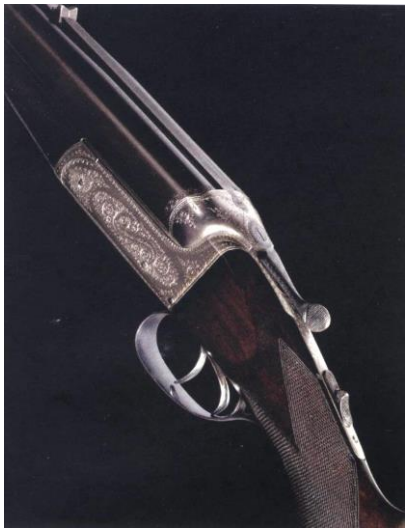
Westley Richards, who produced an extensive fully priced catalogue to mark their centenary in 1912, priced their standard best boxlock with detachable locks and single trigger at £68, plainer versions costing £15 less and several models with increasingly elaborate finish costing up to an extraordinary £160. Ordinary A&D models from this maker ranged between £17 and £63, and their best sidelock was £75. Double rifle pricing was about £20 more than the equivalent quality gun. Churchill, who also drew heavily on the Birmingham trade and who were, in 1913, newly under the ownership of the founder's nephew Robert, were offering best and second quality sidelocks at £63 and £42 and boxlocks at £52, £31 and £26. Other makers offered medium quality boxlock guns at about £15 to £25, with basic grades starting at £10 and upwards. Ejectors in these lower price bands were usually optional extras. Provincial retailers would sell boxlock guns at lower prices – David Baker's book[4] reprints an entire Edwardian provincial retailer's catalogue. Hammer guns were usually offered at a quality and price to undercut the cheaper boxlocks – although best hammer guns were still being made to order by the leading makers at best gun prices.

Rifle 5523 was typical of Wilkes production during this period. It was a Harper finished boxlock non-ejector .500 double rifle with 24" Krupp steel barrels, with engine turned rib and side clips, sold retail to a Capt. R Adair Hall in 1911 who was based in Dublin. We don't know the price but it was probably £25 to £30. A very similar rifle 5530 was sold to Whistler the same year for £20 trade price. A new foresight was fitted in 1913, and the rifle returned to Ireland. Capt. Hall's rifle came up for sale at Christie's in December 2006. It was in well used but all original condition and made £5,500. 5426 was a similar rifle to Capt. Hall's but in .450/.400 calibre with 26" barrels. It was ordered for Vaughan in February 1910 but ended up being sold to Boss & Co in November of the following year for £20, which would have been a discounted trade price.



Capt. Adair-Hall's rifle 5523 as it appeared in Christies catalogue in 2006.

The declaration of war in August 1914 unsurprisingly prompted a surge in demand for goods and services that would be essential to support the war effort, and this surge was accompanied by a rapid rise in prices for any commodity in short supply. A public campaign against profiteering quickly moderated any of these price rises that were clearly exploitative. Such behaviour was felt to be unpatriotic, a sentiment that carried much weight at the time. Military side arms were one of the commodities that were so affected. In the early weeks of the war Webley & Scott were briefly offering revolvers and automatic pistols for up to twice their pre-war price from their London shop. The ledger shows that Wilkes apparently attempted to ride the same wave without success. Wilkes had retailed a few revolvers in the run up to the war and they were also starting to come in for service or repair in some numbers. In August 1914 the same Capt. Hall that had purchased the rifle in 1911, and who by then with the King's Regiment at Aldershot, was sent a .450/.455 Webley WG service model revolver with 6" barrel. He returned it a few days later because he thought the price of £10 was too high. Capt. Hall had a point; both the Holland & Holland and Westley Richards catalogues of the time show the WG at £5/0/0 to £5/10/0 depending on specification. Wilkes resold immediately this particular WG to Sir George Agnew of South Audley St in Mayfair for £10/10/0, but promptly refunded £5 to Sir George, and subsequent revolvers sold by the firm were priced at or below the £5 mark.

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Around 1910, gun production was no longer dominated by 12 bores. Significant numbers of A&D double guns in 16, 20, 28 and .410 are recorded, supply coming equally from Harper and Holloway & Naughton. A high proportion was recorded as London proved suggesting that this feature was helping sales. Jack went through a short period in 1909 of recording which specimens were nitro proved but gave this up presumably because it became the norm, and also perhaps because there was no space in the register where it could be written without making the entire entry illegible.

The first gun for which an invoice is found is 5529, a bar action sidelock ejector 12 bore with concealed extension, carved oak leaf fences and engraved with game scenes and fine scroll and coming from Holloway & Naughton. It was supplied in a brass cornered leather case complete with accessories for £28 in late 1911, with the oval engraved to indicate it was a Christmas present from the purchaser to the person whose initials were stamped on the case. This gun was to be re-barrelled in 1933 and again in the 1970s, with chambers being lowered to 3" in 1987. In 1912, a sidelock of similar quality was supplied to Boss & Co, engraved with their Dover St address and named "Robertson", and numbered 6243, a number in their sequence at the time. It was clearly made to order for a Boss customer as its precise stock measurements were shown on the order and it was supplied in a leather case stamped with the customer's initials. The trade price was £24.

The ledger shows in all six guns and rifles being supplied to Boss, along with a single restocking job in the period of four years or so that it covers. It also shows a sale in early 1915 to John Robertson junior on his personal account of a Birmingham proved 12 bore A&D non ejector gun, with draw bolt extension and scroll engraving for £8/10/0. This was a Harper finished gun numbered 8195. Robertson had the entire resources of the Boss factory at his disposal, which arguably at the time was the best in London. His choice of Wilkes to supply this gun suggests that the latter's reputation with Boss was well established by then, even though it is rather unlikely that Robertson wanted this rather basic grade specimen for personal use.

Boxlocks sold around this time were of a wide range of grades and sold at a corresponding range of prices, although there were some minor inconsistencies. 5647 and 5721 were both 12 bore non-ejectors with point finished stocks sold for £15 to different customers, the latter in a leather case for £1/10/0 extra; 5758 a similar gun sold as part of a large order for a Canadian customer for £12/12/0, a .375 Mannlicher rifle in the same consignment being sold for £13/13/0, and the consecutively numbered gun 5757 with an identical entry in the register was sold to a UK based customer for £10/10/0.

A better quality A&D ejector 5872 with the owners crest on the guard was sold for £25 in August 1912, the same price being charged a few months later for 5892 which was a Harper finished sidelock ejector that was London proved, but its customer took almost two years to clear his account after eight reminders. At the top end of the boxlock range was pair of best guns, 5900 and 5901, that were fitted with Squires solid (i.e. chopper) lump barrels, actioned and stocked by Harper, finished by John Wilkes personally and engraved by Jack Sumner, including a gold crest on the bow of the guard. This pair was sold in November 1912 to a customer in Co Cork for £75 complete in an oak and leather case. After five reminders, the customer paid eventually in May 1914.

Looking through Whistler's invoices in the pre-war period, it is clear that this dealer was focussing on the lower priced examples. Hammer guns at under £4; double .410 hammer guns at £3/12/6; boxlocks, usually non-ejectors, at well under £10; and back action sidelock non-ejectors at about the same price, are all typical of the guns Wilkes was selling to Whistler. Whistler would

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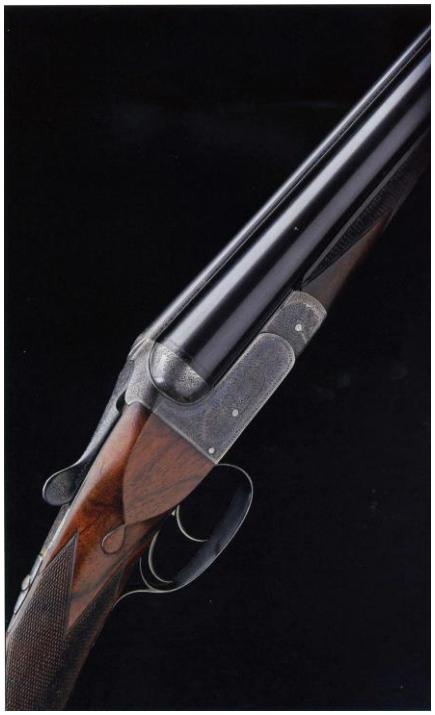
have added a margin, probably around 30%, to these before retailing them, but he would still have been aiming mainly for the bottom end of the market. Only the few rifles he took were further up the price range typically £20 to £22/10/0. The most expensive guns Whistler took in this period were a pair of Harper finished rose and scroll engraved boxlocks 8179/80, numbered 1 & 2, and sold to them in the momentous month of August 1914 for £30. Vaughan on the other hand was taking a mix of grades including several high quality specimens.

A surprising invoice from the ledger relates to gun 4630 which came in for re-jointing in September 1911, for which 4/6 was charged. The customer must have asked for particulars of the gun as sold, because there is a further charge of 5 shillings for searching for the date of sale, price when new etc. It was a plain A&D top lever non ejector, one of very few supplied by Charles Osborne, and presumably Wilkes would have had to look in the sales ledger to find the price. Charging for doing so, although common practice today, was an unusual thing to do in the Edwardian era, all the more so because the person making the enquiry appeared to be the same person who bought it from Wilkes in 1901.



5857 was one of the first guns sold from Gerrard Street in August 1912. Of good quality, it was apparently finished entirely in Birmingham, the Wilkes name only appearing on coverplate and rib.

A few guns further on is a single barrel side lever .410 that was sold to Whistler for £2/0/0 in May 1913 and numbered 5910. Up to this point in the register the great majority of available numbers had been used in the 18 years or so since the register began in 1895 at 4010. There were a few gaps but these are down to minor administrative errors. There then follows a big gap; the next number recorded is 8080, there being a note made that 5911 to 8079 were not used. The crowded appearance of the register was also addressed at this point by a switch to sometimes using two lines for each gun. The gap was the first of several in the numbering system. Whilst the reasons behind some of the later gaps remains a matter of conjecture, this particular gap and some of those that followed accompanied a change of address, firearms numbered after the gap being engraved with the new address. But in practice it doesn't seem to have been quite a simple as this as guns were never sold in the exactly same sequence as they were numbered. For example, 5857 was a high quality boxlock ejector that came up for sale at Holts in 2012 in very good original condition. It was made by Holloway & Naughton, was Birmingham proved and fitted with a proprietary ejector mechanism, and sold to Vaughan in August 1912 bearing the new Gerrard Street address.

Gerrard Street

In 1912 John Wilkes moved from their first floor premises in Lower James Street where they had been for nearly 20 years, to a ground floor shop at 31 Gerrard Street, a relatively wide thoroughfare by Soho standards that runs roughly east-west to the north of Leicester Square. Although originally an integral part of Soho, Gerrard Street, and Lisle Street which runs parallel to it to the south, had been physically separated from the rest of Soho when Shaftesbury Avenue was constructed in the late 1870s. But it retained and still does retain the atmosphere of Soho and

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in the post-war years was to be the location of famous nightclubs. It is, however, hard to imagine now what Gerrard Street would have looked like in 1912 because in the last half of the 20th Century Gerrard Street gradually became the centre of Soho's Chinatown, to the point where it is now a pedestrian precinct with ornamental Chinese arches at either end, all of the shops in the street now being either restaurants or oriental food shops. Some of these are of relatively recent construction but many have had their new function fitted into an older building. Number 31, which is on the south side of the street roughly half way along, is now the Loon Tao Restaurant, but the new purpose has been fitted in to what is quite clearly a largely unaltered Victorian shop front with a basement below accessed by outside steps protected by wrought iron railings. How much of the premises Wilkes rented is not known, but it certainly included the ground floor shop. The brass name plate was moved from Lower James St, but the instruction to ring the bell for attention was blanked off with a small sheet of brass as the customers now had much easier access to the shop from the street.

31 Gerrard Street today as a Chinese restaurant. Although the street itself is much changed, the facade of No 31 has probably changed little since Wilkes left there in the 1920s.

When Wilkes moved there, the southern part of Soho was as well populated as the rest of the district with gun businesses. John Robertson had his earliest London workshop in Dansey Yard, just between Gerrard Street and Shaftesbury Avenue, and then, when he took over Boss & Co, moved to Ham Yard, off Great Windmill St; roughly halfway between Wilkes old shop and his new premises. Both Woodward and Rigby would soon have workshops in this same yard, although Boss's by then had moved their factory a few yards up the road to Lexington Street. But perhaps the real advantage to Wilkes of the move to Gerrard St was that it halved the distance to Vaughan's and Whistler's shops in the Strand.

The ledger reveals a steady stream of retail repair and maintenance work mainly but not exclusively to Wilkes and Dougall guns. These ranged from simple cleaning and regulation which was usually a few shillings, through to major refurbishments after apparently hard use typically costing a pound or two. Restocking boxlocks was charged between £3/10/0 and £5/0/0 and conversion to ejector could be done for £7/10/0. With many of the firearms being shipped to customers abroad the invoice often details the method and the cost of returning the gun to its owner.

There are the occasional trade customers found in the ledger; Boss and Gibbs have already been mentioned. In the second half of 1914 there is a large amount of trade work coming from two department stores, Selfridge & Co in Oxford Street and the Junior Army and Navy Stores at 15 Regent St. Both were mostly sending military weapons for repair and overhaul but there are a few guns in the mix as well. The volume of business was significant, perhaps 20 jobs per month from the two combined, although most of these were completed for a few shillings each.

Early Gerrard Street Guns

The first gun in the new numbering scheme 8080 was a best sidelock. The barrels were filed by Harry Wheeler, about whom we will hear more later, it was actioned by William Baker in

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Birmingham, fitted with Chilton locks, stocked and finished by Wilkes personally and engraved in the Purdey pattern by Arthur Haynes of 58 Frith St in Soho. It had 28" barrels and weighed 6lb 9 oz. It was sold in March 1913 to the Spanish dealer Floriano de los Rios in Barcelona in a leather case with gold plated accessories marked on the outside M.F.de T, the initials of the ultimate customer. This by any standard was a best gun of its day. Its sale price to the dealer was £38/0/0 including the case and shipping, less than half the retail price in London of an equivalent gun from a front line maker.

The same dealer took 8178, a best Wilkes finished 12 bore sidelock with 29" Squires barrels, Purdey style engraving by Haynes with the owner's initials let into the stock in gold letters. He also took delivery of 8181, a boxlock ejector .303 double rifle that was specially engraved to order for £40 in a canvas case.

Later in 1913 a customer in Wales took delivery of a pair of best 12 bore boxlocks, 8127/28 with 28" chopper lump barrels and Southgate ejectors, scroll and flowers engraving and half pistol hands. These were made up and finished entirely by Harper, but were London proved. The weighed in at just 6lbs each and were sold retail without a case for £50/0/0 for the pair. These two examples, where we have a lot of information about pedigree, illustrate clearly the extent to which Wilkes was able to undercut his competition. The retail price of ordinary grade cartridges in 1913 was £5/5/0 per 1000, so a best boxlock was cheaper than 5000 cartridges at that time.

On the same page is an order from a retail customer for a gun to pair with an A&D ejector gun 4897. This was the gun supplied to the same customer in 1903 that had been finished by the young Jack Wilkes personally. Its new pair gun, 8184, had Squires made damascus barrels, was actioned by Harper and engraved by Jack Sumner with scroll and flowers, and finished in the shop by Wilkes. (Sumner, an exact contemporary of Jack Wilkes, was to be the last of four generations of his family in the trade. He is renowned for his engraving work, mainly for Boss, but other makers as well). 8184 was sold for £40 and delivered just after the outbreak of war in a new double oak and leather case for both guns costing an additional £6. This was one of the most expensive boxlock guns that Wilkes made in this period.

8133 and 8134.

8133 and 8134 were a pair of 16 bore sidelock ejectors with 28" barrels and weighing 6lbs. They are noted in the register as being barrelled by Leonard. The Leonard family had many members active in the Birmingham trade and there is no indication as to which of them did this work, but it could well have been Henry Leonard, a barrel filer in Whittall Street. Henry at the time would have been in his 70s but had two sons following him into the trade. The Leonard's work was of high quality; they made guns and rifles for Jeffery and

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others in London. The action, locks and furniture were fitted by Harper who also stocked and finished the guns but they were sent to Haynes in Soho for engraving in the Purdey style. The guns were sold to Vaughan in November 1914. They have come up for sale twice at Christie's in recent years. In December 1971 the pair sold for a hammer price of £1,000, and in December 2006 they sold for a hammer price of £7,000. They are still in remarkably good condition and were recently on offer for sale by a dealer for £20,000.

8135 and 8136 were a pair of 12 bores made by the same men as the pair above. This is 8136. Both pairs were retailed by Vaughan.

Mr. Sefton-Toms

There is one trade customer with whom Wilkes did a flourishing business for a very short period of time, who remains something of a mystery. Charles Sefton McKenzie Toms was born in 1866, the son of a silk manufacturer. By 1911 he seems to have been styling himself as Charles Sefton-Toms and was trading as a silk merchant. When a couple of years later he became a customer of Wilkes he was trading from an address at 12 Piccadilly Arcade, a narrow and quite exclusive covered pedestrian shopping passage that runs for about 100 yards between Piccadilly and Jermyn Street. Between July and October of 1913 Wilkes sold goods and services to Toms totalling £197/15/7. The range and type of these transactions suggest that Toms was setting himself up to trade as a dealer in the style of Vaughan and Whistler, but his business does not seem to have made it into the trade directories from which Nigel Brown made his compilation, nor have I been able to locate Toms' business in contemporary directories. From surviving records he seems to have tried a number of avenues of business during his lifetime, not all of them successfully.

The list of new gun sales was: -

- A best sidelock gun 8132 with Squires barrels, Chilton locks, actioned by Harper, stocked by Leslie Hodges (the son of E.C. Hodges) and finished by Wilkes with Purdey style engraving. Named "Sefton Toms" with the Piccadilly Arcade address sold for £40.
- A London proved second quality Harper sidelock 8089 named "C.S.Toms" sold for £25.
- A London proved point finished boxlock 8088 named "C.S.Toms" and sold for £15.
- A London proved triple bite boxlock 8091 named "Sefton Toms" and sold for £10/10/0.
- A Birmingham proved second quality H&N finished sidelock 8109 with file cut rib border engraved with dogs on locks named "Sefton Toms" and sold for £20/10/0.
- A pair of 20 bore Harper boxlock ejector guns 8105/06 with hidden bite named "Sefton Toms" sold for £35
- A Boxlock non ejector gun from Harper 8123, named "Sefton Toms" and sold for £7/10/0

All of the above were delivered in a two-month period; this starter kit for dealers representing a good cross section of the guns that Wilkes himself was offering at the time. Although the prices charged are nominally trade, Mr Toms does not appear to have been enjoying much of a discount.

In addition, Wilkes finished a sidelock gun that Toms supplied in the white for £8/10/0, restocked a boxlock for £3, sold Toms a second hand pair of Cogswell & Harrison guns for £26 and two

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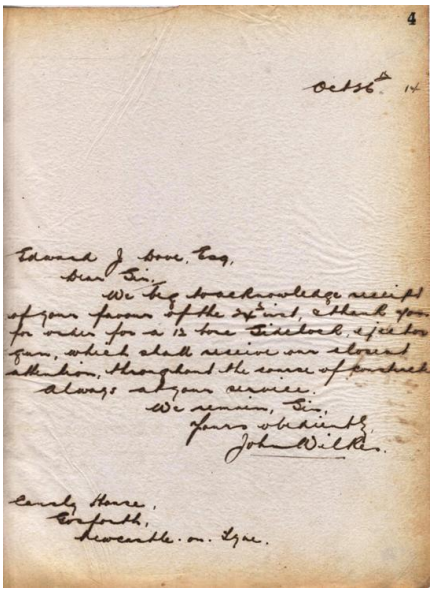
stock blanks for £3/10/0, as well as undertaking several minor repairs and refurbishments. Toms had paid his account in full by the start of 1914 and thereafter there is no further mention of him in the books.

A Collection of Letters

Another surviving relic from this period is a letter book. John Wilkes at the time wrote all his letters longhand, and the system used for keeping copies involved placing the notepaper underneath a very thin sheet of tissue; one of 450 such sheets held in a leather and cloth bound book. The letter was written using a specially formulated ink, of which enough got through the tissue to appear on the letter but a rather blurred sepia copy of what was written was retained on the sheet of tissue in the book. There are fewer than 25 surviving letters, some of which are quite mundane, for example those informing a recipient of dispatch and carriage arrangements for a parcel, and all are from a three-week period starting at the end of October 1914. They are all to customers and give an interesting insight into the customer/gunmaker relationship.

There is one to a Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, informing him that Webley .455 service revolvers are unobtainable, but recommending in its place a Webley 7mm automatic as supplied by Wilkes to two brother officers at £5/0/0 each. There is a letter to a Major based in Cork informing him that the sword that he had left with Webley & Scott for re-hilting had been passed to Wilkes who was pleased to quote £4/10/0 for the job with an extra £1/1/0 for a new Sam Browne scabbard. There are two or three other enquiries about swords, in one of which Mr Wilkes assures an interested customer that whilst they don't keep a stock of swords they can make them to order within a week. There is a letter to a customer in Kensington telling him that Wilkes "would be pleased if you would call at your convenience, as we wish to see you regarding the barrels of your gun". Probably not good news –the gun was returned without repairs being made.



The letter in John Wilkes hand acknowledging the order for the sidelock ejector that would become gun number 8199.

There is a chain of letters relating to a single order for a sidelock gun for a customer in Newcastle. The first is to the customer acknowledging the order. There is another of thanks to the customer in Wales who, the previous year, had bought the pair of best boxlocks, and on whose recommendation the new order was placed. And then there is a lengthy exchange of letters regarding the optimum weight for a 12 bore sidelock gun, which ends with Mr Wilkes recommending the gun weigh 6lbs 6oz. This gun 8199 was delivered to the Newcastle customer in August 1915. It was barrelled and actioned by Leonard in Birmingham, with best 29" barrels and locks, the stock had points and a gold oval. It was engraved by Thomas Sanders & Son at 148 Wardour St, the firm which Henry Kell father and son would take over in 1919 on Sanders' death. It weighed 6 lbs 6½ ozs and cost its customer £35. Gun 8199 came back for re-barrelling in 1964.

On the previous page in the register is a unique gun 8190. This was another Leonard made sidelock built to pair with a Holland &. Holland Royal 16440 for another customer recommended by the same person as the previously described gun. This was fitted with Brazier locks and engraved by Haynes in the H&H pattern and finished by Wilkes in London. The customer paid

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£48/0/0, the highest price for a new gun in the invoice register, but still only about 60% of what H&H would have charged had they made up the pair. A best oak and leather double case, with implements and a crest engraved on the boss cost a further £6/10/0.

And finally we come to a pair of guns that may be the reason the invoice register survived. In 1948, a Mr Ward writing from an address in Sussex asked Wilkes for particulars of a pair of guns 8191/92. Whilst the register has no details of these, the invoice book describes a pair of 12 bore sidelock ejector guns, with arms and crest together with a motto in a ribbon engraved on the underside of the actions, the same crest being on the boss of the double oak and leather case. In his letter, Mr Ward describes the crest and from it correctly identifies the Welsh family for whom the guns were made. He says the guns were still in brand new condition at the time of writing and that they were of the best quality and workmanship that he had ever seen, with "stocks of a quality we may never see again." The invoice book therefore is the only record of these guns, whose price, complete in case was £79/10/0 for the pair when they were sold on June 24th 1914.

Challenges Ahead

1915 and these few fine guns mark a convenient point to break our story. Gun production became very erratic once the momentum of orders placed before the outbreak of war was dissipated. Wilkes by now had been in business for twenty years. The proprietor was approaching his sixtieth birthday and three sons, Jack, Tom and Fred, then aged 29, 26 and 21 respectively, were all working with him in the business. In the first 20 years of its existence the firm had produced about 1770 guns and 160 rifles bearing the John Wilkes name, about 60% of the weapons that would do so in the 108 years that the firm would trade in London. Little had changed in the business model during the first 20 years. The mix of work for trade, of retail versus dealer sales and the sourcing of work from Birmingham and London arms of the trade were substantially the same in 1915 as they had been in 1895.

In the wider trade, we now can see that the period from 1895 to 1915 had seen the effective completion of the evolution of the British sporting gun. The single trigger and the under and over actions that were developed during this period, combined with ejector actions developed in the 15-year period from 1880, substantially completed the portfolio of designs that the trade needed to prosper. All the trade needed from now on were a steady supply of men who knew how to make them to the necessary standards of quality, and a steady supply of new customers willing to pay the prices that this quality required if manufacture was to remain profitable. All but a very few of the proprietary actions that had seemed so important to John Wilkes' mentors Hodges and Dougall, and others like Beesley and Lancaster, had fallen by the wayside, the majority of the trade gravitating towards a few tried and by now tested designs. Although many makers were to continue the search for technical innovations that would provide a commercial edge, very few examples of success in these endeavours would surface in the rest of the century. Even one of the most prolific inventors in the Birmingham trade, William Baker, was later to admit that with the A&D action and the Southgate ejector, the trade had access to the best of their kind and that the days of patents were therefore over [21]. Those that would appear would be but minor improvements when compared to the innovation that had taken place in the sixty or so years leading up to 1915.

The success of the Wilkes business in the 20th century was to hinge on its ability to change and the global conflict that had just begun was to provide the impetus for the first of those changes.

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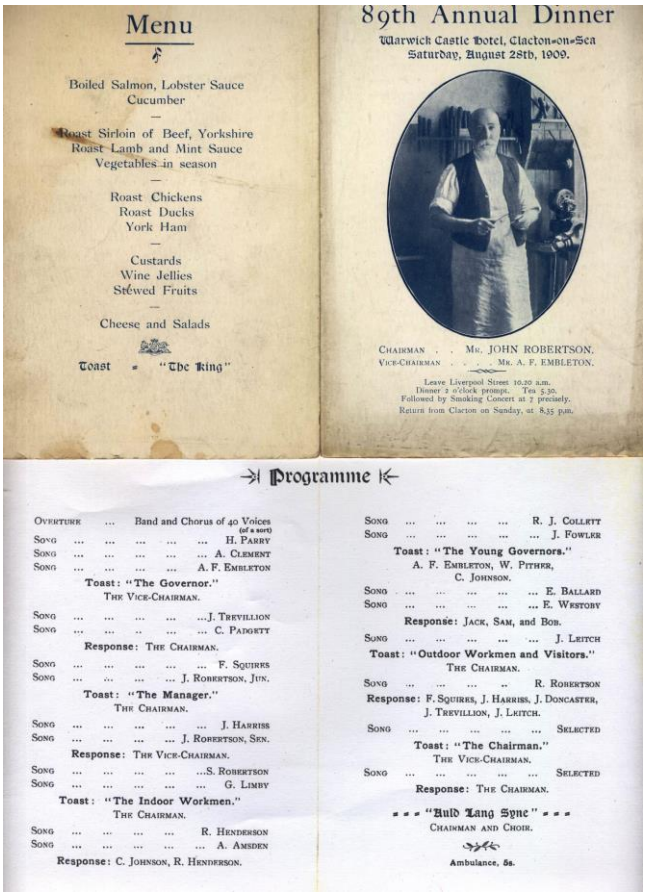
Chapter 5 – War and After 1915 - 1927

1915 was the first year in which the European War was to have a serious impact on John Wilkes' business. There had been signs of the effect of conflict the previous year when there had been a sharp upturn in the numbers of officers, particularly regular army officers, bringing in side arms for service and repair and sometimes buying these new, but the demand for sporting firearms had continued beyond the outbreak of war in August and volumes of these produced remained unaffected until the backlog of orders had been cleared.

1915 was also the year in which "John Wilkes, Gun Maker" appeared for the first time in the London Telephone directory of August of that year on Regent 1139, the phone having been installed at some point since the publication of the previous directory in July 1914. Many of the more prestigious gun makers had installed telephones somewhat earlier than this, but few of the outworkers had them at this time, so it is likely that the impetus behind getting this new device was to communicate with customers.



Menu

Boiled Salmon, Lobster Sauce
Cucumber

Roast Sirloin of Beef, Yorkshire
Roast Lamb and Mint Sauce
Vegetables in season

Roast Chickens
Roast Ducks
York Ham

Custards
Wine Jellies
Stewed Fruits

Cheese and Salads

Toast — "The King"

89th Annual Dinner

Warwick Castle Hotel, Clacton-on-Sea
Saturday, August 28th, 1909.

Chairman . . Mr. JOHN ROBERTSON.
Vice-Chairman . . Mr. A. F. EMBLETON.

Leave Liverpool Street 10.20 a.m.
Dinner 2 o'clock prompt. Tea 5.30.
Followed by Smoking Concert at 7 precisely.
Return from Clacton on Sunday, at 8.35 p.m.

Programme

Overture ... Band and Chorus of 40 Voices (of a sort)
Song ... H. Farry
Song ... A. Clement
Song ... A. F. Embleton
Toast: "The Governor."
The Vice-Chairman.
Song ... J. Trevillion
Song ... C. Padgett
Response: The Chairman.
Song ... F. Squires
Song ... J. Robertson, Jun.
Toast: "The Manager."
The Chairman.
Song ... J. Harriss
Song ... J. Robertson, Sen.
Response: The Vice-Chairman.
Song ... S. Robertson
Song ... G. Limby
Toast: "The Indoor Workmen."
The Chairman.
Song ... R. Henderson
Song ... A. Amsden
Response: C. Johnson, R. Henderson.

Song ... R. J. Collett
Song ... J. Fowler
Toast: "The Young Governors."
A. F. Embleton, W. Pither, C. Johnson.
Song ... E. Ballard
Song ... E. Westoby
Response: Jack, Sam, and Bob.
Song ... J. Leitch
Toast: "Outdoor Workmen and Visitors."
The Chairman.
Song ... R. Robertson
Response: F. Squires, J. Harriss, J. Doncaster, J. Trevillion, J. Leitch.
Song ... Selected
Toast: "The Chairman."
The Vice-Chairman.
Song ... Selected
Response: The Chairman.
"Auld Lang Syne"
Chairman and Choir.

Ambulance, 5s.

JohnWilkes seems to have been regularly invited to Boss & Co's Annual Dinner, several programmes from the Edwardian era are in the archive. This one, for the 1909 event in Clacton, features "Outdoor Workmen" Frank Squires and John Doncaster, both of whom met tragic ends. J. Harriss also plays a prominent role, possibly the same individual that was John Wilkes' partner in the 1890s.

The spring of 1915 also was the time of a tragedy, the story of which was passed down the Wilkes family. London had been subject to a precautionary blackout since the end of 1914, although Zeppelin bombing raids on the capital were not to happen until the middle of 1915. John George Doncaster was an engraver, not exclusively a gun engraver, who ran a business in Oxendon Street, a road that ran north-south just to the east of Piccadilly Circus, a couple of hundred yards from Wilkes' shop. He was an outworker to the trade who worked amongst others for Boss & Co and also for Wilkes. Whilst we know some of the London engravers that the firm used around that time, for example Sumner, Sanders and Haynes, there is no record of Doncaster. Wilkes must have placed business with him because when he was closing up on the evening of 13th April, Doncaster was with him in the shop and offered to see him safely across the Haymarket on his way home. Why a 71 year old would do this for a man not yet 60 is not clear. On his way back across the busy thoroughfare in the darkness of the blackout, Doncaster was hit by a horse drawn tram, one of the last of its kind. He died at the scene.

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Gunmaking until the end of the war was to become rather sluggish and there were few unusual guns produced in this period. It is also a period where there are few records other than the register to draw on, so there are but sparse clues as to how much other work was undertaken. Whistler supplied about 60 refurbishment jobs a year, about half the rate of pre-war work. The War certainly caused a massive upheaval in the Birmingham trade; as many resources as possible being redirected to military arms production, but despite this Wilkes seems to have been able to continue to get small numbers of guns from Harper in particular. In the four years from the start of 1915 to the end of 1918, about 150 guns and 4 rifles were turned out, about a third of the annual production in the years immediately preceding the war. In 1915 Mr de los Rios in Spain took delivery of a good A&D 12 bore and a .500 boxlock rifle, and Messrs Fortnum & Mason in Piccadilly took delivery of a .450/.400 rifle in February 1916. A nice A&D non-ejector with best furniture and Squires barrels was made for a retail customer, but these apart almost all the wartime production went to the dealers; Vaughan more so than Whistler.

8206 was a medium quality 16 bore made by Harper and sold to Whistler for £16 in March 1916. For a gun in this price bracket it had an exceptionally good stock.

Retail prices between 1914 and 1919 rose by about 110%, wages by 140% and this is reflected in a steady upward creep in the price of jobs charged in Whistler's ledger. A pair of Holland guns had been refurbished ("Do up as new" is the term used in the ledger) in July 1913 for £2/12/0. This would have involved a strip and clean, re-blacking of the barrels and furniture, re-polishing the stocks and refreshing the chequering, blueing the pins, reassembly and testing. The same job on a pair of Rigby guns in 1919 was charged at £5/0/0.

Although Vaughan took two pairs of best guns, a pair of 16 bore boxlocks 8294/95 in May 1917, and a pair of 12 bore sidelocks 8338/39 five months later, production was really slowing down by the time the war had ended. It is easy to assume that this was due to a lack of demand, but this may not have been the only reason.

The Birmingham Business

A few months after the armistice of November 1918, Vaughan was apparently starting to see more demand for guns than Wilkes could meet from a Birmingham trade that had been largely turned over to war work and which was not yet back to peacetime production. He agreed to lend Wilkes £2,000 to fund Jack going up to Birmingham to pull together the people and facilities to start making guns again of the type and quality that the London market needed.

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This was to mark the most significant change yet in the way that John Wilkes sourced their guns. It also marked a complete change for the Birmingham arm of the John Wilkes business. This had been carrying on at an address behind 24 High Street in Aston New Town with its proprietor, John's uncle of the same name, in retirement up to his death in 1916, perhaps fulfilling a role in managing the supply of guns to the London shop. When Jack arrived he rented premises at 64a Bull Street, moving in 1922 up the road to 62a Snow Hill, both premises being on the south-western boundary of the St Mary's area. The family story is that by the time he had built up his organisation he could call on the services of more than 20 men. It is probable that they were not all directly employed or even all housed in the Wilkes premises and probably only a few were engaged exclusively on work for the firm.

The register at this time shows this sudden change of arrangements. The finisher column for the next few pages is now normally populated with the initials JW, most of the guns having a bold underscored **B** next to the finisher column, to indicate they were finished by Jack Wilkes in Birmingham. The first such guns were 8389 and 8390; two similar Birmingham proved 12 bore A&D boxlock ejectors with scroll and flowers engraving and point finish. They were delivered to Vaughan for £30 each on 30th October 1919, not quite a full year after the end of the war.

8429 is a medium grade 12 bore boxlock ejector, made and proved in Birmingham by Jack's team in September 1920, and pictured here in unrestored but sound condition for its age. It is typical of the Birmingham firm's production. It bears the Gerrard Street address. Unusually it was sold to a retail customer rather than to Vaughan

One of relatively few sidelocks made by Jack in Birmingham, 8468 was no 2 of a pair, London proved and engraved by Henry Kell. The pair were sold to Vaughan in November 1921.

A few months after arriving in Birmingham, Jack, then aged 34, married Grace Harrison, some seven years his junior, in Aston in the spring of 1920.

Jack was to produce almost 200 guns in the next four years from the Birmingham arm of the business for sale in London, occasionally supplemented by firearms from either Holloway & Naughton or Harper. All but a very few of Jack's guns ended up being sold through Vaughan's shop. Vaughan must have felt he got a good deal with his loan because he was to remain one of Wilkes's largest trade customers for the next 20 years. The register shows that of the firearms made by Jack in Birmingham, a high proportion were Birmingham proved and all were guns rather than rifles, Harper still being called upon to provide the occasional rifle that was needed. Whilst most guns were boxlocks with Southgate ejectors, there were batches of both non-ejector boxlocks and bar action hammer guns still being ordered. The majority of guns were in 12 bore but Wilkes still supplied a steady stream of guns in the more popular smaller bore sizes. They did not make guns in 14, 24 or 32 bores. There was a continuing demand for best guns, both boxlock and sidelock, most of which were supplied ready finished from Birmingham whilst a few were finished in London by the proprietor personally.

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In 1920 comes the last record of damascus being used for the barrels of a new gun. This was 8471; a special order boxlock non-ejector finished in London sold in May of that year to a retail customer that appears to have been made to pair with an older gun. When Wilkes started in 1895, damascus had been used on more than half of new guns, this use gradually dwindling to the point where, in 1905, perhaps two guns out of 23 on each page are so fitted. By 1915 its use had become quite exceptional and this gun was to be its last appearance.

Trade work around 1920 was still an enormous part of Wilkes's business and he must have had significant resources in the London shop to deal with it. Although jobs were coming in from Whistler far slower than hitherto, work from Vaughan accounted for 95 pages of ledger entries in 1920 alone, in all amounting to some 700 repair and refurbishment jobs. For instance, just picking one week at random, on 4th February, 8 repair jobs came in, costing in total £23. Of these, two are returned completed the next day, another, a re-blacking job on 3 guns, a week later. Another 4 jobs (3 "Do-up as new" and one dent raising and rib relaying job) are returned by the end of March, and the final job, a re-barrelling, in August. Only 3 jobs came in during the next 5 days, but then, on 10th February, 18 jobs costing £33 came in, of which all but two had been returned completed by the end of March.

The Vaughan register makes fascinating reading, in terms of the scale and scope of the work being undertaken, the timescale in which it is done, and the modesty of the prices that are charged. They are far from all being routine strip and clean jobs. There are re-stocking jobs, re-barrelling jobs and major reconstructions, like ejector conversions, the fitting of new trigger plates or new lumps in barrels – the sort of work that would be really difficult to get undertaken today. And the firearms that come in are from right across the market, from low-end Birmingham trade guns through to major repairs on the products of all the best London makers. There would have been no time for much of this work to be sent to outworkers if it was to be returned to Vaughan this quickly, so working in John Wilkes workshop at this period would have provided an enormously broad experience in many aspects of the trade. This was to be an enduring feature of the business for the rest of its life.

Whilst we have in the Vaughan ledgers the trade prices of a great many of the guns that were made up by the Birmingham business in these four years, the immediately post war years were a time when the value of money was fluctuating wildly, so it is unreliable to try to infer too much about quality from price during this period. Having doubled during the war, retail prices in the economy as a whole peaked in 1920 at about 140% above pre-war levels, but thereafter fell steadily back until in 1932 they stabilised at only 40% above the levels of late Victorian and Edwardian times. The prices of best guns more or less followed retail prices long term such that best guns were selling in the 1930s for £100 to £130 compared with the £65 to £90 of the early 1900s, but there is some evidence from the extensive tabulation that Brown[9] has made that some makers tried to ride the 1920 price wave, whilst others were slow to adjust their pricing only to find the inflationary pressures recede in the new decade.

The first guns to appear in the number sequence, rather than date of sale, that were made by JW in Birmingham were two pairs of London proved best 12 bore sidelocks with very normal specifications including gold ovals, 8384/85 and 8386/87, which were sold to Vaughan in December 1920 for £100 each pair, the dealer presumably then selling them on retail for at least £120. Also delivered around this time were numerous boxlock ejectors priced at £30 each. All had very similar specifications – Scott spindle, Southgate ejectors, Anson rod fore-ends and point finished stocks with fine scroll and flowers engraving. Nearly all the boxlocks had a Boss third bite and they mostly came in weighing around 6½ lbs for the 12 bores.

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There was a steady demand also for bar work hammer guns with cross bolt extensions and snap on fore ends, made up by JW in Birmingham, which went out at £8/10/0 each. In 1921 a line of 28 bore A&D non-ejectors was introduced that sold for £17/10/0 each. There are records of sales of consecutively numbered guns of this type to both Vaughan and Whistler, both at the same price, showing that Vaughan's loan was not being repaid by discounting the guns he took. Wilkes did however keep a separate account for all the receipts for the sale of the Birmingham made guns. The striking thing about the work that Jack was turning out in Birmingham was the degree of standardisation he was achieving. Although the totality of the production in Birmingham only fills a little over eight pages in the register, there is page after page of guns all very similar to one another. There was much more variation when guns were being finished by multiple Birmingham makers pre-war.

After about 100 Birmingham made guns have appeared in the register, including a further two best sidelock pairs for Vaughan, there are two A&D guns at the bottom of a page that were made up in London, 8492/93. These were chamberless, 12 bore, top lever, non-ejector guns made up for Dr C.J. Heath, a man who was pioneering this type of gun for wildfowling. Dr Heath supplied the barrels to go into these guns which were chambered for the Gevelot 3" brass case. They had 28" barrels and the guns weighed 9lbs 4oz. They were supplied to Mr H. Beesley, who was apparently acting for Dr Heath to get the guns made. Beesley traded from 48 Loveday St in Birmingham, and at least one other Heath designed gun, a side lever boxlock, is in existence that bears his name and address. It is not clear if this was Frederick Beesley's son, Herbert P. Beesley, who was to take over to the London business on his father's death in 1928. Dr. Heath also had guns made for him to his designs by F.T. Baker and John Ross, and probably others.

Golden Square Again

In the middle of 1922, John Wilkes moved their London shop to 21 Broad Street, right in the middle of Soho. The explanation that Jack was to give later of this move was that his father felt that retail business would be improved if they could get back to an address nearer to Regent Street. Whilst they were at Gerrard Street retail sales of new production had been well under 10%, but the country was at war this for much of this time. The Broad Street shop was portrayed in anecdotes told much later as temporary accommodation pending the final move to Beak Street, but Wilkes was to be at this address for over three years, and whilst it may not have been entirely satisfactory, I doubt that it was seen as a temporary arrangement right from the outset. Even in those days, when the firm would have had little in the way of heavy machine tools, the prospect of moving an entire shop and workshop, with the cabinets, stock, benches and all the tools, must have been a formidable undertaking, particularly with work from Vaughan coming in all the time.

Broad Street was, as its name implies, a wide and rather short thoroughfare that ran east-west in the middle of Soho between Marshall Street and Berwick Street. It had the distinction of being the site of the water pump that had been identified as the source of the 1854 cholera outbreak. Broad Street was renamed Broadwick Street in the late 30s, at which time the short Edward Street, that was its eastward continuation, was included in the new street. Many of the buildings in Broadwick Street were then redeveloped after the war. With all these changes, I have not been able to determine the site of 21 Broad Street in modern Broadwick Street. In 1911 it had been a private house in multiple occupancy. Broad Street was convenient for the trade in the early 1920s. Squires' barrel shop, which was still functioning despite the proprietor's recent death, was a few yards in one direction in Berwick Street, and Boss' factory a few yards in the other in Lexington Street. Henry Kell was even closer at 38a Broad Street.

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Wilkes telephone number was unchanged with the move but his directory entry now appended Golden Square to the Broad Street address, a postal requirement to distinguish it from another of the same name in the City. Golden Square was about 200 yards away on the walk between the shop and Piccadilly Circus. Adding this to his address would hardly have helped Wilkes' customers to find the shop, but it did give the impression it was situated close to what West End shoppers might have recognised as civilisation.

The move was accompanied by another hiatus in the register. After a flurry of H & N made boxlock ejectors destined for Whistler at £26/10/0 there is a gap in the numbering system, 8506 to 9005 not being used, and the new series then kicks off with some Harper made non-ejectors with the cheaper tang lever work, also destined for Whistler at £17/10/0, before the JW operation in Birmingham starts taking up the numbers again. In July 1921 there is another pair of best sidelocks for Vaughan, 9035/36, which were similar to those made previously except they were engraved by Kell and are named with Vaughan's name and address. These are the first guns in the register recorded as being engraved by Henry Kell. The price of the pair was the same as before; £100.

Not all guns made with numbers above 9005 were marked with the new address. Some were sold before the move, and the sale dates of consecutively numbered specimens often differed by a year or more, so the practical implementation of the numbering and addressing scheme can only be tested when guns surface that still have their original rib address. 9037 was a double .410 boxlock, made unusually by Harper in this period when Wilkes were doing most of their own manufacturing. This was sold in 1921, well before the move and bore the Gerrard Street address. The 21 Broad Street address is only rarely encountered on Wilkes guns and the register suggests it could only have been applied to a maximum of 200 guns made during this period bearing numbers between 9005 and 9242. Gun number 9110, a best boxlock with a Baker single trigger made by Jack in Birmingham in mid-1922, has the highly unusual naming "John Wilkes & Sons" on the action bar. This does not appear to have been reflected in the structure of the firm; it became a partnership only after John Wilkes senior died. It is perhaps an attempt to indicate the increasing role that Jack, and to a lesser extent his brothers Tom and Fred, were by then playing in the running of the firm.

In 1923 there are 8 unexceptional boxlock non-ejector guns on one page of the register that are also named Vaughan, so he seems to have been experimenting with the effect of branding on sales. At the bottom of the page are four unusual guns. 9148 to 9150 were all 32" barrelled and 3" chambered guns, proved for 1½ oz shot and weighing around 8lbs. Then first two were ejectors, the last 9150 a non-ejector. They were smartly finished being fully rose and scroll engraved with point finish to the stocks and no extension on the barrels. These were all made by Jack in Birmingham and sold to Vaughan in August 1922. The last gun on the page, 9151, is a best 16 bore sidelock ejector, engraved by Kell, described as a" Model de Luxe" and made for C.B Vaughan Esq. to his personal measurements. On the next page are a further seven Vaughan named boxlock non-ejectors, the last one of which 9161 was the last gun to be made by Jack Wilkes in Birmingham in March 1923.

Leaving Birmingham

Two events seem to have contributed to the decision to close the Birmingham arm of the business. After Jack had been in Birmingham for a while, his reputation for competence in running a gunmaking operation seems to have spread. He was invited to go to Webley & Scott's factory for lunch with the company secretary, probably in 1922. As he was shown into an imposing office Jack had noticed a gun on a table to one side. After a conversation that amounted

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to an interview, his host, who had given the impression that he had only a rather superficial knowledge of the practicalities of gunmaking, asked Jack to go the table, take a look at the gun on it and tell him what he thought of it. Jack had recognised the gun as a Belgian boxlock on his way in and knew exactly what its strengths and weaknesses were without looking at it – he would have worked on many similar guns in the London shop that had come in from the dealers over the years. Belgian guns were seen as the biggest competitive threat to the British trade at the time; Burrard[10] devotes a considerable amount of space to criticizing them. Jack's performance at providing a critique of the gun so impressed his host that he offered him the job on the spot of managing Webley's gunmaking factory.

Jack declined the offer straight away. His father appears to have been in failing health in the early 20s and he must have been wondering who would take over the running of the family business when the time came for the founder to leave. Neither of his younger brothers seemed up to the task. To have accepted a job in Birmingham would have probably meant the closure of the firm of John Wilkes. As Jack would tell his two sons many years later, had he made a different decision they would have been brought up in the Birmingham trade rather than the London one, a distinction that for a gunmaker is not without emotional overtones.

In declining the offer outright, he felt he owed his host at Webley's some help in finding an alternative. Roland Bloomer was an old friend of Jack's and ten years his senior. He was a nephew of Henry Whitby who had made many guns up for Wilkes in the early years. By the time of this meeting, Bloomer was working for Webley's as one of their best actioners and Jack was sufficiently sure of his friend's ability to recommend him without reservation for the post he had just turned down, indeed he thought Bloomer was the better qualified of the two of them. Bloomer was to work for Webley's for the rest of his professional life, still going in to the factory once a week at the age of 82. The Wilkes family believed he was instrumental in setting up the production lines for Webley's 700 series boxlocks which were available to the trade, but not retailed, before the war.

Roland Bloomer

Roland Bloomer was an actioner, stocker and finisher who undertook some of Wilkes' most challenging best work in the early 1930s. He worked in total on 28 guns in this period, always as an outworker. For this reason, his contributions are mostly recorded in the invoice book which details the work that he did and the prices he charged. The individual guns are described later in the main text.

Roland Charles Bloomer was born in Birmingham in 1875 to Henry, a blacksmith and his wife Emma, the youngest of three sons, his brothers being Henry, born in 1870 and William Jesse, born in 1872. His father, who became a publican sometime in the 1870s, died in 1879, whereupon his mother succeeded to the family business as recorded in the 1881 census. She died in 1884 and the three boys, all then under 14, were then adopted by their uncle, Henry Whitby. By 1891 all three boys were in the gun trade apprenticed to their uncle, Henry as a finisher and Jesse and Roland as gun action filers. By 1901 only Roland is still resident in the Whitby home and by now he has changed his trade to stocker, apparently still working for his uncle. Both his brothers appear to have continued in the trade although Jesse seems to have switched to using his first name of William.

The Wilkes registers show a steady stream of guns supplied by the Birmingham trade between 1898 and 1907 as supplied by Whitby. It may be that the young Jack Wilkes struck up a friendship with Roly Bloomer around this time.

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By 1911 Roland had been married to Helen for nine years and the family with two twin daughters were living in Sutton Coldfield. Roland now had reverted to describing himself as a gun action filer. He was still an employee although we don't know if he still worked for Whitby. At some point during the troubled years up to 1920 Bloomer seems to have taken up employment with Webley & Scott, where in 1920 he is shown in their records as the actioner of some of their best sidelocks.

Bloomer was extensively employed by Wilkes between 1929 and 1933. It is probable that he was still working for W&S at the same time, perhaps on short time because of the depression, as their production of guns in 1932 sank to an all-time low. Wilkes certainly made extensive use of several master craftsmen who ostensibly normally worked for other makers during this period. Significantly perhaps, one or two of the guns on which Bloomer worked from this period have Webley components such as single triggers and safety mechanisms.

Wilkes' use of his services seems to have stopped in the early thirties apart from one invoice from 1937. The next mention of him is an exchange of letters that by chance have survived on the files from the 1950s. I have reproduced these almost in their entirety because they say much about the frustrations experienced by craftsmen in their declining years.

The first is a letter from Mrs Bloomer to Jack Wilkes dated January 1957, sent from the home in Sutton Coldfield, about 5 miles northeast of the centre of Birmingham, where the they had lived for 50 years.

"I am writing on behalf of my husband whose eyes are not too good. He was delighted to get your letter as we often talk of you, and I was so pleased when you visited us here for the night. Rolly has recovered now after an illness and his health has improved. He goes to W&S once a week just to keep in touch. And he gave me a message to give to you about Mr Crathorn. He is back at W&S now, so Rolly sees him every Tuesday. Rolly sends his good wishes and a special good thought for your brother Mr Thomas Wilkes…."

The next letter on the file is from Jack in July 1958

"Just a line to ask how you are going on. It is some time since we had news of you but you are always in our thoughts and we are continually reminded of you when the fine guns you built for us pass through our hands from time to time. None of us are as robust as we used to be or as we would like to be, but that can be put up with if we keep fairly well in health. All things considered we trust you are as well as possible….."

To this there was a quick reply from Mrs Bloomer.

"I am writing on behalf of my husband as his eyesight is too poor for him either to read or write. Your letter was a great delight to him. For one thing he felt his friends were thinking of him and secondly it brought memories of the fine guns which you mentioned in your letter. Until a few months ago Rolly's health was in fairly good shape, especially for his age and he used to go weekly to W&S just for a day which he enjoyed exceedingly. Since then he has not been so well owing to bad circulation and his condition has so deteriorated that he can scarcely walk and uses a wheelchair. What makes the situation worse is that Rolly is unable to read so that time hangs rather heavily. He keeps cheerful though in spite of all this misfortune. He sends his very best wishes to you and your brother and it would be a great joy if one day you might find it possible to visit him….."

Roland Bloomer died on 11th March 1960 at the age of 85.

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The other incident to bear on the decision to close the Birmingham business was a letter that Jack received from his father around the end of 1922. In it John pleaded with Jack to return to London to help him with the running of the business. The letter said that his two younger brothers, Tom and Fred, were fighting with one another in the shop with empty ginger beer bottles. As Jack's son, John, observed when recounting this story more than eighty years after the event, if they were having a fight in a gun shop it was perhaps a small mercy that they didn't choose any more effective weapons than empty bottles. Having already made the decision not to make a long term career in Birmingham, this letter seems to have been the trigger for Jack to close down there.

We can only speculate what that closure involved. It is unlikely that Wilkes had many, or even any, men on full time employment – most would have been on piece work, so the closure would have involved the men finding other makers to send work to them, and perhaps also finding an alternative workspace. The Wilkes family believe that the then recently established firm of A.E.Bayliss took on some of the men, but Wilkes were to draw almost exclusively on Harper to supply guns and rifles for the rest of the 20s, only putting significant amounts of work to Bayliss from 1930 onwards. So it would seem that Harper's firm must also have been involved in the redeployment of resources after Wilkes departure. One thing is certain; Jack Wilkes was from then on to be regarded by many of his peers in London as the man to approach to get the best work out of Birmingham. So he cannot have ruffled too many feathers when he left.

Shortly after returning, Jack Wilkes' wife gave birth to their first son, who was named John William Harrison Wilkes, the third forename being his mother's maiden name. John was born on 26th May 1924. His mother gave birth to his younger brother Thomas Frederick on 10th November the following year. So for the third generation, the Wilkes family had a John and a Tom Wilkes, both of whom would go on to take over the family firm.

The attraction for heavy load guns established with the three that Jack had turned out in 1922 continued. At the end of 1923 Harper made up three boxlock non ejectors very similar to those of the year before with full choke in both barrels, filed up with full ball and bead fences and no extension, and again proved for 1½ oz load. These were sold for £22, one to Whistler, and two to Vaughan. They obviously proved popular because these orders were followed up by a further seven similar guns over the next three years, making 13 of these 3" chambered guns in all.

This gun, 9763 was near the end of the batch of 3" chambered 12 bore guns with 32" barrels. This one, an ejector, was made by Harper in October 1925 and retailed by Vaughan. The quality and style are evident in this little used example.

Production of Wilkes guns was very slow in 1924; three ordinary boxlocks for Whistler, three good double .470 ejector rifles and two similar in .475 for Vaughan and another .470 for Whistler, all sold for £42/10/0 each, account for most of that year's production. Wilkes was drawing on contacts in Birmingham to perform work for the London trade. A surviving day book shows that in July 1924 Wilkes supplied twelve finished boxlock guns to Rigby, named and numbered in their sequence between 17990 and 18010 at £12/10/0 for non-ejectors and £18/10/0 for ejectors. In February of the following year, these were to be followed up with further made-up boxlocks, and barrelled actions; three pairs of sidelock ejector barrelled actions being supplied for

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£210. Wilkes also charged them between £5 and £10 for finishing three guns to customer specifications. In the four years from 1924, Wilkes were responsible for supplying or finishing 54 guns for Rigby as well as doing major repair jobs for them on others. Although Rigby was supplying a lot of work, they were not alone, both Gibbs and Boss were customers in the mid-1920s; two Robertson named and numbered boxlocks being supplied to Boss in 1926 for £15/10/0 each.

There were three of Wilkes own guns supplied in 1924 that contribute to the story. Two of these, 9192 and 9241, were apparently supplied by Harper as partially complete boxlock barrelled actions. One of these was then fitted with lock work, safety and ejector work, the other with just ejector work by none other than Bob Henderson, Boss' long serving and much renowned actioner and factory manager. Henderson took on various outwork jobs during his time away from Boss in the 1920s, amongst them these two guns. These were then proved and finished in London by Wilkes, one engraved by Jack Sumner, the other by the London engraver M. Jacobson, before both were sold to retail customers in the closing months of 1924. The third is 9239, an unexceptional boxlock, that has "Fathered for XX" in the finisher column, Jack's way of indicating that his father had given it special attention and XX being was the abbreviation for Vaughan. John Wilkes senior was therefore still working at the bench in 1924.

Bob Henderson

Robert Henderson was born to Scottish parents in Malta in about 1876, his father being a colour sergeant in the army. The young Henderson must have led an itinerant lifestyle, his siblings being born in Plymouth, Portsmouth and Aldershot. He was living at the last of these places with his parents in 1881, but ten years later Robert was living as a lodger in Edinburgh and working as an apprentice Gun Maker. By this time his father had left the army and was a trader in North Berwick in East Lothian, a fishing port about 15 miles east of Edinburgh. Donald Dallas[14] records that Henderson served his apprenticeship to Daniel Fraser. Fraser's business was at its peak in the 1880s and 90s making mainly the rifles for which he was renowned. He also made guns of exceptional quality, his boxlock guns of the period being built to a quite unusual design. By 1901 Henderson had recently married and moved to Clapham in south London where he joined Boss, then under the ownership of John Robertson and family. Robertson himself came from the same area in the Scottish borders, from Haddington in East Lothian where his father had a long established gunmaking business until the late 1880s. Curiously in 1901 Bob describes himself as a "gunsmith" in the census return, most of his contemporaries in the trade preferring to describe themselves as gunmakers; indeed Green of Cheltenham is reputed to have thrown a customer out of his shop for referring to him as a gunsmith [20]. By 1911 Henderson had wisely reverted to calling himself a gunmaker and was still living in Clapham with his wife and now two children.

Dallas gives a lot of information about Bob Henderson and his role at Boss over almost sixty years, including a number of stories that give a clue to his character and to his extraordinary ability as a gun maker. We will confine ourselves here to aspects of his career that are largely excluded from Dallas' book. Dallas records that Henderson had risen to become manager of the factory in Ham Yard, off Great Windmill Street, in Soho in 1910, at which time the total Boss workforce was around 40. They would have needed them all; the order book for the period shows that in 1912 and 1913 they took orders for 282 guns of which 46 were for the recently introduced Under & Over. Henderson had been heavily involved in the design of this gun and was a key contributor to its manufacture.

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An actioner In Purdey's factory using a bow drill in the 1950s to put in the vent holes in the fences of a gun.

One of the many difficult steps in making the U&O (as they were abbreviated at the time) action was the drilling of the two holes that run the full length of both sides of the action bars to take the rods that trip the ejectors. These holes start in the knuckle just above the barrel pivot and emerge from the back of the action in front of the tumblers. Any error in the alignment of the hole would result in the drill breaking out the side of the action. Henderson used to put these holes in with a bow drill, an ancient design of tool that consisted of two parts. There was the drill itself consisting of pad that was pressed against the operators abdomen into which fitted a bearing for a simple drill axle, with a tapered square to hold the bits at the business end, and a bobbin on the shaft further back. Around this passed a cord attached at both ends to a spring steel bow with a handle at one end, bent to provide enough tension to allow the cord to grip the bobbin. By moving the bow from side to side, the drill rotated first in one direction and then the other. The advantage of the bow drill was that it allowed precise control of the direction of the drill, making it the tool of choice for this job. The bits used were simple D-bits, round hardened steel with one side ground away. These cut in both directions – ideal for this type of drill. The story goes that when Bob was putting in these holes the entire workshop went quiet. On one occasion he was midway through the process when the end of the bit broke off in the hole and no amount of mechanical persuasion would get it out. Henderson drilled in from the back of the action to meet the hole he had already drilled, but although he hit the broken piece of bit, it was so firmly stuck that he could not drive it out mechanically for fear of pushing out the much softer action wall. With everyone watching discretely, he made up a little nipple like that on a percussion gun, threaded it into the hole in the back of the action, filled the hole with black powder, refitted the nipple and lit it. There was a bang and the end of the bit was duly blown out of the hole, leaving everyone else to get back to work, wondering how on earth Bob thought of solving the problem that way.

The Boss U&O is an exceptionally elegant looking gun, not just in the geometry of its unusually shallow action, but in the flow of its lines - all of its components; action, barrels, lock plates, fore-end iron and woodwork have shapes that contribute to the beauty of the completed gun. But all of these components are made and shaped separately; only coming together as the gun is stocked. Henderson was one of the best of the small number of master men in the London trade who could build this elegance into a gun from its rough components. John Wilkes remembered asking him how he did it when Bob was in his seventies. The reply was that you had to "see the finished gun in your mind's eye". John was not much helped by this advice, but it showed how the best men in the trade combined superlative mechanical craftsmanship in wood and metal with artistic talents usually more associated with sculpture.

After John Robertson senior died in 1917, Wilkes' story is that Henderson was expecting to be taken into partnership in the firm, in recognition of his importance at the factory and his contribution to the U&O in particular. When in 1918 it became apparent the three Robertson brothers were intending to keep the firm in the family, Henderson walked out, but not before he had cut through with a large triangular file the action of a completed U&O gun that was on his bench.

Having burned his boats so demonstratively, he seems to have spent the next few years in various aspects of the trade, including a spell working for Rigby's. John Wilkes recounted a story about a set of boxlock try guns that Henderson made up for the West London shooting ground, working as an outworker in a back bedroom equipped only with hand tools and a treadle lathe.

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Because of the unique features of a try gun, Bob had been unable to get suitable action forgings, so cut the actions out of a block of wrought iron with a hacksaw, and took them on to completion without any machining; using drills, drifts and cutters in the traditional way.

How long elapsed before he joined Rigby's after leaving Boss we don't know. He was certainly with Rigby when there was a terrible accident in their workshop. A bolt rifle was being held in a vice whilst the magazine feed was tested with live ammunition. For some reason the rifle went off, the bullet hitting the man at the next vice in the upper abdomen, passing right through him and then through the workshop wall, crossing the street and coming to rest in the wall of the building opposite. The unfortunate man was mortally wounded but was able just to say just before he died that it wasn't the fault of his colleague who had been working on the rifle. This seems an odd opinion to reach in the circumstances.

Henderson hated bolt action rifles and was unhappy at Rigby', so he was not there for long. He was certainly doing some outwork for Jack Wilkes, with whom he had a close friendship although Jack was nearly ten years his junior. They met outside work as well and Jack had played a small part in the development of the Boss single trigger in one such meeting before Henderson left Boss. A few years after the trigger was introduced guns started to come back with trouble caused by the turret sticking. In a conversation with Bob, Jack suggested using nine carat gold for the coil spring that rotated the trigger turret once the first barrel was fired. This was inside the base of the turret, the steel spring that was used in the early versions being prone to corrosion. This corrected the problem and all Boss triggers since have been fitted with Jack's suggested modification.

Henderson returned to Boss in early 1926, but was still buying and selling small components with Wilkes from the end of 1928 through to 1931; in total this business was about £50. The manner of his return to Boss, which was much wanted by both parties but neither wishing to be the first to give way, is described in Dallas' book. Bob Henderson and Bob Robertson were both invited separately to a drink in the same pub. Dallas records Alec Robertson as the go-between who set the meeting up. John Wilkes remembered his father telling of having played some part in it as well. Whatever the details, Henderson was to stay with Boss for the next thirty years. Even in the 1950s, when he was 80, Bob still commanded awe in the workshop. His last apprentice, Ian Hunter, remembered everyone being called to silence so that Bob could identify a problem with a single trigger by listening to it.

The underside of the turret of a Boss single trigger, this one the semi-selective version, showing the gold coil spring. The threaded peg in the centre screws into the trigger plate.

An incident that must have occurred around this time was recounted by Jack's son Tom some sixty years later. It must have been passed down to Tom from his father and it concerned Boss & Co. There is no evidence in the surviving records to support it, so it is pure anecdote. I believe the events that follow must have occurred sometime between Jack's return to London and the beginning of detailed Wilkes records in mid-1927, and whilst Bob Henderson was absent from Boss's factory, probably between 1924 and 1926.

Wilkes took in from a customer a Boss U&O which required re-jointing. The Boss U&O is held on the face by two steel draws on either side of the action that are held in place by pins that come through the side walls of the action. These draws have bearing surfaces that fit against arcs on the forward edges of the two rear "lumps" on either side of the lower barrel, pushing the barrels backwards on to the face as they close. They work to hold the gun tight in exactly the same way as the bearing surface on the forward edge of the rear lump of a side-by side does, pressing

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against the circular arc in the front of the rear action slot. To re-joint a Boss U&O requires these steel draws to be replaced with slightly larger ones. The gun was sent round to Boss because they had the steel blanks and the jigs to cut new draws far more quickly than Wilkes could have done. It came back a few days later, back on the face. A short while after it was delivered, Jack picked it up and saw that all that had been done to it was the hammering up of the two lugs that slot in to the two pivots in the action knuckle. As these provide no structural strength to the joint, they are just hinges, Jack was furious; he knew that the gun would be off the face again after a very few shots. He walked straight out of the shop carrying the gun the 100 yards or so to Boss's Lexington Street factory, where he took it straight into Sam Robertson's office. Words were exchanged and the gun was returned to Wilkes a few days later properly re-jointed. This incident stands out as an exception in the relationship between Boss and Wilkes which otherwise was, by all accounts, one of extraordinary cordiality and mutual respect.

Another Move

A number of typical boxlocks, both ejectors and non-ejectors, as well as an order of basic hammer guns were supplied to Vaughan in 1925, but then there is a gap in the register, 9243 to 9741 being the unused numbers. As the guns after the gap date from around the time of the move to 79 Beak Street, it is probable that this gap was to allow for the next and final change of address.

Beak Street was just round the corner from Broad Street, another road running east-west, but in this case ending on the major thoroughfare of Regent Street. It is much narrower than either Broad Street or Gerrard Street, and has numerous roads leading off on both sides along its length. About halfway along on the left hand site are Upper James St and Upper John St, both opening out after fifty yards or so into Golden Square, the site of John Wilkes first shop. Between these two to the right is Carnaby Street. In the 1920s this was, like other Soho streets, a home for artisan industry, but in the 1960s it was to become a centre of London's Swinging Sixties fashion revolution, several artisans, including the last sword maker in Soho, having their premises demolished to make way for this.

The earliest surviving buildings in Beak Street are artisan's houses dating from the early part of the 18th century, and several of these survive on the northern side of the street, the south side having been redeveloped for commercial purposes more recently. Until 1883, what is now Beak Street was in two parts, the eastern end was Silver Street and only its continuation into Regent Street, which was at a slight angle to the line of Silver Street, was known as Beak Street. When Regent Street was redeveloped, the line of Beak Street was altered to straighten it up and the entire road given its present name.

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Sold to Vaughan around the time of the move to Beak St in December 1925, this .470 ejector double rifle 9764 was supplied by Harper. This picture is from a Sotheby's catalogue of April 1989 when it sold for £4600.

The first examples to go out with the new address were typical examples of Wilkes recent production. They were nearly all supplied by Harper and sold to the dealers, mostly to Vaughan – there were very few retail customers coming in to the new shop to buy guns. A 12 bore gun 9800 was one of the few sold retail in the autumn of 1925, about the time of the move. It was the first gun Wilkes was to make with 25" barrels. They would go on to make quite a few more with 25" and 26" barrels in line with the trend in the market that had been started by Churchill. Wilkes had always turned out light boxlocks. In the Edwardian era they had made 30" barrelled boxlocks at 6lbs 5oz, and by the 1920s even their 28" barrelled guns could weigh only a little over 6lbs if required. Their short barrelled guns were not significantly lighter than those with 28" barrels.

212 Grove Green Road in Leytonstone was John Wilkes home in the 1920s. The house still exists, a modest single fronted terraced house in the eastern suburbs of London, a few yards from the main A12 road as it leaves London on its way east to Chelmsford, Ipswich and beyond. It was where John's grandsons had been born in 1924 and 1925, and it was where on 2nd September 1927 John Wilkes died at the age of 72 after a lifetime as a gunmaker. He left an estate of £1043, about £50,000 in today's money inflated in line with retail prices. It was a very modest legacy, perhaps reflecting the size of the family that John Wilkes' business had supported. More importantly for the continuity of the business was that, by the time of his death, John had trained Jack to be a master gunmaker more than capable of carrying on the business to the standards he had set. Jack's brother Tom was also working in the shop, but their younger brother Fred was no longer involved.

John's death came at a time when Britain's post war economy was nearing collapse and the gun trade was far from immune to the crisis that would follow. The business would need to be changed further to survive the difficult times ahead. Under Jack's leadership, the next twelve years would be the time when Wilkes would produce some of the best work ever. And with Tom's record keeping we have a uniquely clear view of what that involved.

But before we look back at the early years with Jack at the helm, it is worth taking a look at the place where it all happened; 79 Beak Street.

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Chapter 6 – 79 Beak Street

The Building

The Survey of London describes the original 18th century houses that stand on the north side of Beak Street as follows *"... the construction was cheap, though not shoddy, and the finishings were simple, befitting houses intended for tradesmen and lower middle-class occupation."* No 79 is one of these; it is the second building on the right when entering Beak Street from its junction at the eastern end with Lexington Street. The British History website reveals that numbers 75-79 Beak Street were built by two carpenters, Caleb Waterfield and Thomas Cook in 1718, the first tenant, a victualler from St James's by the name of James Turner moving in the following year. When it was built, the street was still named Silver Street and this group of houses were numbers 4-1 Silver street respectively The conversion to a shop was undertaken over a century later around 1850 and in 1925, when Wilkes moved there, it had most recently been a stationer's shop. Prior to that, at the turn of the century, it was a last and boot tree maker's workshop. Directly opposite is a Victorian office building which stands on the corner of Great Pulteney Street, the gap that this quite wide thoroughfare produces in the rather high façade opposite allowing some light into the upper floors of number 79.

79 has a basement and four other floors, and when it was re-fronted as a shop, the ground floor was given four elegant arched windows on to the street, separated from one another by thin frames, starting about 2 feet above the ground and going right up to the ground floor ceiling. When Wilkes moved in, its previous use had required at some point the insertion of a steel joist running the full width of the basement to give extra support to the weight of stored paper on the ground floor. A cast iron kingpost had been placed on this in the middle of the ground floor to extend the support to the first floor.

79 Beak Street viewed from the corner of Great Pulteney Street. The corner with Lexington Street, the site of Boss's factory in the 1930s, is just visible behind the pedestrian on the right.

By no stretch of the imagination was this a building that was ever designed to be a gunmaker's workshop, with all the heavy equipment which that would entail, but the building survived being used for this purpose for nearly eighty years, accommodating as time went by increasing amounts of machinery. In all that time the structural strains that appeared were easily repaired. The building, which was over 200 years old when they moved in, was to give good service to John Wilkes despite its "cheap" construction.

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Wilkes rented the ground floor, the basement and the first floor; workshops being on the first floor and in the basement, the latter also being used for storage. On the ground floor was the front shop, illuminated by the four shop windows at the left-hand end of which was the shop door to the street. Behind the shop, and separated from it by a partition with a door in its centre close to the kingpost, was the office. There were no brick built interior walls on any of the floors, all of the internal divisions being achieved by timber partitions. Facing inwards on the ground floor, there were fireplaces to the right in the front of the building and another at the back in the far-right corner. These were replicated in the basement and on all the higher floors. Next to the shop door and separated from it by a stout pillar was another door to the street that gave access to the upper floors and basement without going through the shop.

This street door led into a corridor that ran the full length of the left side of the building. About half way along this widened, the corridor continuing towards a door into a small yard at the back, besides which were a steep flight of stairs leading right and then back in the direction of the front door and down into the basement. Above the basement steps and starting at the point where the corridor widened was a flight of stairs going up on the right towards the back of the building, on reaching which they had a U-bend illuminated by a window to the rear, followed by a few more stairs to reach a small landing on the first floor. Here there were doors to the two rooms, one ahead leading into the front workshop, that was blanked off whilst Wilkes were there, and another to the left leading in to the rear workshop which was fitted with all the bolting paraphernalia necessary for security. There were similar U-shaped staircases leading to the second and third floors. When the time came for Wilkes to leave the building there were several visits by English Heritage, the body charged *inter alia* with safeguarding buildings of historical interest. It was only then that it was discovered that the U-shaped staircase was highly unusual in a building of this age, the normal practice when the property was built being to run the stairs straight.

Thus far this is a description of the fabric of the building, the features described above would have been there in 1925 when Wilkes moved in and they are still there now, a decade or more after they moved out, for the building's current use as an art gallery. The interest in it as a gunmaker's shop and workshop derives almost entirely from the fittings, the tools and the machinery that Wilkes had there to make their business possible. This was mostly movable and was periodically re-arranged to suit immediate needs. These different arrangements were largely unrecorded.

The Front Door

To the new visitor to the shop the first obstacle was the front door. This had interior bolts but was secured at night by an exterior padlock. Access to the building when the shop was locked was gained through the side door, and depending on how busy the shop was expected to be, it was quite common to leave the shop door locked with the padlock on the outside. The shop windows were often blocked at night with corrugated cardboard to conceal the cabinets of guns from the street, and this was often left in place all day to save the effort of replacing it next evening. Once the person who opened the building had cleared the alarm in the office, they would then sometimes go straight upstairs or perhaps work in the office, leaving the shop in darkness and the door to it very obviously padlocked. To the new customer unfamiliar to the business this could be a little off putting.

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The secret was the bell which was to the right of the doorway at head height. Sometimes pushing this produced an immediate result, someone in the office coming through the shop, unbolting the door and letting the hopeful customer in. But if there was somebody on the premises disposed to answer the door bell and the padlock was on, they would have to come out of the side door to unlock the shop door to let the customer in. Here the pillar between the two doors played a role in that it was just wide and deep enough for the side door to be out of sight of the customer with nose pressed to the shop door, giving them the disconcerting feeling of someone creeping up on them from behind. If there were only one or two people working at the time, they were most likely to be in the first floor workshop. When the bell rang, it was possible to see in the large plate windows of the office opposite the reflection of anyone waiting at the shop door, allowing those working at the bench the opportunity of deciding whether or not to pretend to be out. Regular customers tried to counter this by devising little jingles they could play on the bell in the hope that, by so declaring their identity, they might sway in their favour the decision as to whether or not to answer the door. These arrangements all meant that Wilkes probably got less than their fair share of passing trade.

A recent close up of the shop front, now the Riflemaker Gallery but externally unchanged from when Wilkes were in business, showing the shop door and the side door next to it.

The Front and Back Shops

The front shop was slightly L shaped to accommodate the foot of the stairs. In recent times there was a fine mahogany and glass gun cabinet with capacity for about 16 guns on the left wall immediately inside the door and another slightly smaller cabinet in the fireplace on the opposite side wall. At the front of the shop under the window and running its full length was a knee-high counter with storage drawers underneath. Forming the back wall was a built-in black painted gun cabinet, with sliding glazed doors and

The Front Shop looking towards the shop door, just out of shot on the left. This photo taken in 1998 shows the long cabinet on the right almost empty. In earlier times it was usually full.

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storage cupboards below accommodating perhaps 30 guns, which ran from the left corner to the office doorway. Behind this, and forming the entrance passage to the office, was a full height metal cabinet in which ammunition was stored and on the opposite side of the doorway were racks up to ceiling height in which cases were stored vertically. To the left of the door to the office was a small glass window that gave a view of the shop and the front door to anyone seated at the desk. All around the walls were various hunting trophies, and a few framed pictures including a montage of military badges and a cartridge display, some collective pictures of members of the Gunmakers Company, and, in recent years, a fine picture of Jack Wilkes taken in the shop in the 1960s. Recently there was also a low table in the middle of the front shop, where customer's gun cases could be placed whilst their contents were inspected or where parcels could be wrapped or unwrapped. Although the shop was of reasonable dimensions, with all the fittings in place, and especially the table in the middle, it felt quite crowded if there were more than four people in it.

The rear corner of the front shop, showing the door to the back shop and the internal window over the desk. The usual collection of stored cases includes a very impractical flat quadruple case made in the 1980s.

The feeling of claustrophobia increased on entering the office, usually referred to as the back-shop, which had about two thirds of the floor area of the front-shop. In here there were two desks, one facing the wall to the right of the doorway and the other at right angles to it on the left, just past the doorway that opened to the bottom of the stairs. Beyond this desk was a safe with cupboard above, a filing cabinet and on the back wall under a window that looked out onto the yard was a seldom used small bench with a leg vice and horse, whose main purpose was to allow customer's guns to be examined preliminarily whilst they waited at times when the shop was single manned. At shoulder height were shelves that accommodated all the firm's ledgers, and around all the walls above these, including over both desks and over the doorways were shelves for gun cases. At one time there was even a double height double sided gun rack in the office, but this was removed in the mid-70s to allow some room for people.

This inventory of all the paraphernalia in the shop and office only goes a little way to describing the atmosphere on entering the shop when at its busiest. The cabinet inside the door was in the 1970s filled to overflowing with really fine guns by the leading makers and all in pristine condition. Its opposite number to the right was likewise filled with antique weapons, and the one along the back wall completely filled with more English guns and rifles. The only U&Os in sight were by Boss and Woodward and there was scarcely a foreign manufactured gun to be seen. Most of the visible firearms belonged to customers, and although a few were sometimes for sale, most were either being stored for their owners or awaiting repair or alteration. There were cases everywhere, a few new ones recently arrived from Bryant's along with cartridge bags and slips for sale, but most were older ones holding customer's guns, and it was these that were stacked to the ceiling in the corner of the shop and all around the office.

It was not until the 1970s that familiar customers were allowed to venture beyond the shop and office into the first floor workshop. Throughout the pre-war period and through the fifties and sixties there were nearly always five or more people working in the shop and workshop, so there were always enough to engage customers downstairs in the shop thereby allowing those in the workshops to carry on uninterrupted. Jack certainly recognised that more work would get done

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upstairs if he kept customers downstairs. From the 1970s onwards the numbers working on the premises was rarely more than four and often as few as two people, meaning that if customers were kept downstairs, work upstairs came to a halt. So for practical reasons it became customary to invite many more customers upstairs. And these fortunate few were allowed to see the museum that was the Beak Street workshop in operation at first hand.

The First Floor Workshops

The upstairs workshops comprised two rooms separated by a doorway with no door. The front workshop was over the shop and the side corridor, and the rear one over the office. The front workshop had three tall sash windows onto the street under each of which was a bench space with a leg vice. Leg vices, which were made from forged wrought iron, were preferred by Wilkes over the cast engineer's vices, one of which they had tried but which had broken under the strain of regular use. All of the benches were covered with tools, a great many of them handmade by past generations of apprentices. Neither of the Wilkes brothers was habitually tidy, many tools being left where they fell after their last use. There were more of these in racks on the walls above the benches. Whilst the purpose of some of these handmade tools was quite clear, there were many where this was not the case. John would sometimes amuse himself by handing one to a visitor inviting them to guess what it was for. As I recall there was just one of these where he had no idea either.

Another of John's ways of amusing visitors to the workshop was to ask them to identify old forgings from the drawers. This example was one of the least obvious. It measures 6 x 2 cm and is a steel forging for a pair of Southgate ejector kickers. After filing the two vertical faces flat, the forging was then cut down the line of the notch. There is then still some way to go to the finished pair of parts!

A wide-angle view of the front workshop. The three window benches are partly concealed by the island bench supporting some power tools including the long lived bench grinder.

Guns were always taken out of their cases before being brought upstairs for work to be done on them. There they could be stored fully assembled either in racks or leaning up against the wall in a convenient corner; or they could be taken apart, the barrels and fore-end being put vertically in one of several long wall mounted barrel racks and the stock and action hung by the trigger guard

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or cross-pin from one of several rows of wall mounted hooks; or they could be stripped down, the action parts ending up in a box in large rack, and the stock going in another rack. Whilst the gun may have come up to the workshop bearing a label, the parts were never individually labelled once the gun was disassembled, so reassembly would often involve quite some skill in finding and recognising all the component parts of a long-disassembled gun.

The floor of the workshop was made of wide and ancient timber planks, cut long before the days of tongued and grooved flooring, which over the years had shrunk so that gaps developed between them. In a few places there was a disconcerting springy feeling in the floor, and there were one or two areas where steel sheet covering had been applied to reinforce the boards. The only floor to actually collapse under the strain was on the stairs where John fell through by the window half way up to the first floor. The main peril that the floor held was in the gaps between boards which were just wide enough to accommodate the little parts that can sometimes fly away with a pinging sound when a gun is being incautiously disassembled. Even if the part had not fallen through a crack, there were sufficient boxes of other tools and equipment stored long term under the benches to make the search for these tiny components a real trip down memory lane.

Two of the three front window benches, with leg vices and in their usual state of tidiness

All along the dividing wall in the front workshop were storage cabinets. Since the mid-seventies a Myford Lathe was installed on top of these just to the right of the doorway, but it was the storage cabinets underneath that held the real treasure trove. In one large multi-drawer cabinet were a myriad of parts. Some of these were unused, sets of furniture, locks in the white, triggers, guards and the like, but most were either old stock dating from pre-war times or components that had been extracted from guns that had been scrapped, many of them best guns. These had been sorted such that that there were drawers of mainsprings, sear springs, sears, tumblers, triggers, trigger plates, guards and all the rest. These were the first port of call for repairs; and there were some notable successes, like the time that perfect replacements for both mainsprings on an almost unused percussion gun by Lang were found, the original springs having been broken by accumulations of gummed oil in the root of the V. More usually the spares drawers yielded a part that was close but not quite close enough. In other drawers were a mass of hand made and machine made cutters, the former dating from the time when most of the work of shaping of the working surfaces of an action was done with brace driven tools. These would sometimes be used to make replacement parts, the trick being to find the right cutter.

In the cabinet under the lathe were boxes of rifle parts and many forgings, stampings and machinings, some of relatively recent origin but some dating back to the percussion era. There were also patterns for machinings, wooden models that the smith would copy exactly to make an

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action body or some such of exactly the right size, perhaps with extra metal in certain places to accommodate part of the mechanism of a patent action. Although many of these bits and pieces had their origins in Wilkes' past history, a good few of them had come from other makers seeking to find a home for components of little marketable value when the time came for their workshops to close. By this means Wilkes had accumulated identifiable components and tools from the likes of Woodward, Dougall and Bozard, as well as numerous other items of more anonymous origin.

The Myford lathe against the dividing wall between front and back workshops. New barrels are in racks above and storage of many different components in the cupboards below. On the far wall are the boxes used to hold disassembled guns.

Aside from the lathe, the front workshop was equipped with a "Denbigh" P7A pillar drill bought off Buck & Hickman in 1944 for £24/18/0, and a Black & Decker Junior model bench grinder mounted on an island bench in the middle of the room, also bought in 1944 for £8/8/6 and whose bearings were still perfect in 2003 despite continuous use throughout its life. It would never have passed muster with a safety inspector because of the entire absence of guards, the fitting of abrasive wheels on a tapered mandrel and several other infringements. There was also a belt sander further along the same bench. Power to this bench was provided by wires running in a tubular metal conduit that ran from the side wall close to ceiling height, from which were suspended perhaps thirty or more old gunstocks, many of them exquisitely figured. Whilst a very few of these were cannibalised to provide a piece of wood with a particular colour or figure, they mostly served to collect dust, whilst at the same time providing an ornament for visitors to admire. When the shop closed these were to be taken away by a carpenter hoping to laminate them into planks that would serve as coffee table tops, a project which failed when he discovered that most of them had been bored hollow to achieve the right balance for the gun of which they had once been part.

In the back workshop was a fourth bench and vice under the rear window and a further bench along the separating wall, which was only occasionally used in recent years. Above this was the oiling rack, a long series of pegs above a shelf between which stocks could be propped as they were oiled repeatedly to finish them. In the area between these two benches was an enormous and beautifully engineered iron cast and bend jig. Next to this was a lathe that had been scrapped by the Parker Pen Company before the war and which had so much lateral movement in the headstock that it was unusable by normal mortals, but on which John could turn small components. After the Myford arrived, this was used only for polishing out barrels.

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There was also a gas ring and a torch that were used variously for brazing and soldering, and for the soda blacking pot. There was a sink which had over it a gas water heater; turning on the water would cause the gas to flow and it would then ignite after a short delay with a small explosion and hot water would flow. Gradually the delay got longer and longer and the explosion got less and less small, until one day it removed the eyebrows from a customer waiting for hot water to wash his hands. Thereafter only cold water was available. Beside the sink was a roller towel that was replenished with a clean roll regularly on a service contract. This towel wasn't just used for the hands; it was used for wiping off alkanet oil, emery and all kinds of other debris from gun parts. Quite what the company that took the dirty towels away were able to do with them after a turn at Wilkes remains a mystery.

The back workshop, with John's bench under the window. The explosive water heater and the much-abused towel dispenser are on the left. In the centre are two massive stock jigs, the rear one of which is supporting the blacking pot. The old Parker Pen lathe is on the right.

The Basement

The basement was a single cellar that ran the full length and width of the building, accessed by the narrow and rather steep stairway from the corridor by the back door. There was some natural light from light wells front and back, the one at the rear being separated from the back yard by iron railings. At the front there would probably originally have been a similar arrangement but the need for a pavement on Beak Street meant that at some time the well had been covered over, the light now coming in through translucent glass blocks. We don't know what the cellar was used for in the 1930s, probably mainly for storage, but underneath the rear window was a bench with a leg vice and lighting, so at some point work was done down there, although latterly that area was used only for storage. During and immediately after the war when it had become clear that the firm would be taking on more trade work, John had set about installing machinery in the cellar.

The first step was to provide a solid concrete floor to provide a sound base as originally it would have been just bare earth. John used to claim he had used black powder double rifles as reinforcements for the concrete; but whether he actually did this will be for a future generation of archaeologists to discover. He may have just said this to emphasise that for many years before and after the war you couldn't give these fine, obsolete calibre rifles away; they had no commercial value at all. Some of the machinery installed in the basement was brought in for use in war work in the early 1940s. The remainder was installed immediately post-war to help with

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bolt rifle manufacture. The last acquisition was a stock copying machine that was acquired in the 1970s. These developments will be covered in more detail in later chapters.

The cellar looking towards the front. The line shafting supplying power to the three lathes, all ex-Woodward tools, is visible. The rightmost lathe is a barrel boring bench, and the one in the centre is set up as a horizontal mill for machining rifle stocks.

The cellar was used for storage, and there were so many hiding places down there that every now and then something valuable would be discovered. Tom found a pair of made up and machined chopper lump barrels ready to be jointed into an action that Jack had wrapped up in brown paper and put down there twenty years earlier when they were surplus to requirements. But there was also a lot of other material that was less immediately useful. All the time Uncle Tom was keeping the books he would bundle up all the supporting paperwork for a year's business, invoices, tickets, letters and the like. These would then be wrapped in paper and string, the year written on the outside and the bundle then consigned to a metal cabinet by the back fireplace in the cellar, where all of them appear to have remained entirely undisturbed. Whilst these proved to be a fascinating source of information for this book, I doubt it was that purpose that motivated Uncle Tom to keep them.

Eeighty years of test firing guns did this to the rear wall of the cellar.

The final use for the cellar was for test firing guns. This was done only when necessary, but for certain repairs and adjustments like single trigger regulation or correcting misfires it was essential to fire live rather than blank ammunition, and the only expedient way of doing that was somewhere on the premises. The person doing this would warn those in the shop, don a pair of ear protectors and fire the gun along the right wall of the cellar aiming at a point about two feet from the ground on the back wall by the fireplace. There never seemed to be any problems with ricochets, but the whole building, particularly the office which was immediately above, seemed to jump in the air with the concussion. Over time the back

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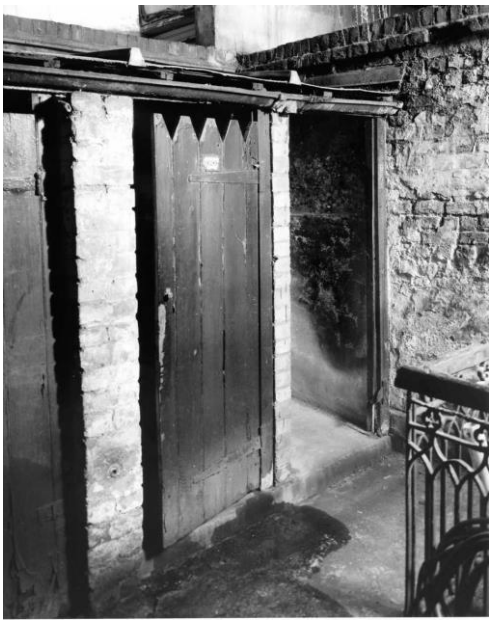
wall gradually started to disintegrate and a film of brick dust settled on everything in the cellar to add to the films of emery, swarf and wood dust produced by the machines. Until the fifties the same technique had been used for test firing rifles, but this was reluctantly abandoned when a particular test coincided exactly with the water supply to the café around the corner in Lexington Street being interrupted by a completely inexplicable underground fracture of their water main.



The usual offices, in Estate Agent parlance, were not for those of a nervous disposition.

79 Beak St only had outside lavatories; three of them in the back yard against the boundary wall. When Wilkes were in occupation, the condition of these required fortitude and determination on the part of the prospective user. Only one functioned with any certainty and then only in practised hands. Whilst we can look back on the rest of the premises with some nostalgia, this is part of the building that anyone who experienced it would prefer to forget. John enjoyed recounting a story about Rigby's, who had similar outdoor lavatories, behind their shop in the 1930s. One of their staff was disposed to spending too much time in there in the opinion of his colleagues. Hints had no effect so one day they laid a thin trail of black powder under the door of the cubicle leading to a pile of it just inside the door where it wouldn't be noticed. When the offender had entered and settled inside, the trail was lit at the outside end. The expectation was that it would burn as it does in films, slowly leading to the pile which would ignite with a flash and a puff of smoke. Unfortunately the powder was fine and of good quality. The trail burned in less than a second and the pile at its end exploded with enough force to blow off the door and singe the eyebrows of the occupant. 79 Beak Street's facilities were never the scene of such drama.

The cubicles in the back yard are still there. Indeed when Wilkes left in 2003, 79 Beak Street had the dubious distinction of being the one and only residential premises in the entire City of Westminster that did not have an inside lavatory.

Today

79 Beak Street is now (2013) the Riflemaker Gallery. The present occupants have kept the shop front and signs, now a little faded as it is approaching forty years since it was last repainted. Also intact are the front door and the partition for the side corridor. The front and back shops are now one large space, with the fireplaces much more in evidence. The removal of the partitioning between these two spaces has caused some anguish to the planning authorities who believe they were part of the original 18th century fabric of the building. The original flooring is much more clearly visible now that the whole area has been opened up. Only one board needed replacing with a salvaged contemporary piece of timber after being punctured by a visitor's high heel. Upstairs the front workshop is a gallery, the old doorway that was immediately ahead at the top of the stairs, that was blanked off when Wilkes were there, is now reopened, and the floor has been slightly refurbished but the positions of the bases of the leg vices can still be seen, although the benches have gone. The back workshop is now the gallery office. Only the basement, which is still accessed by the original wooden stairs, has been completely altered having been relined on

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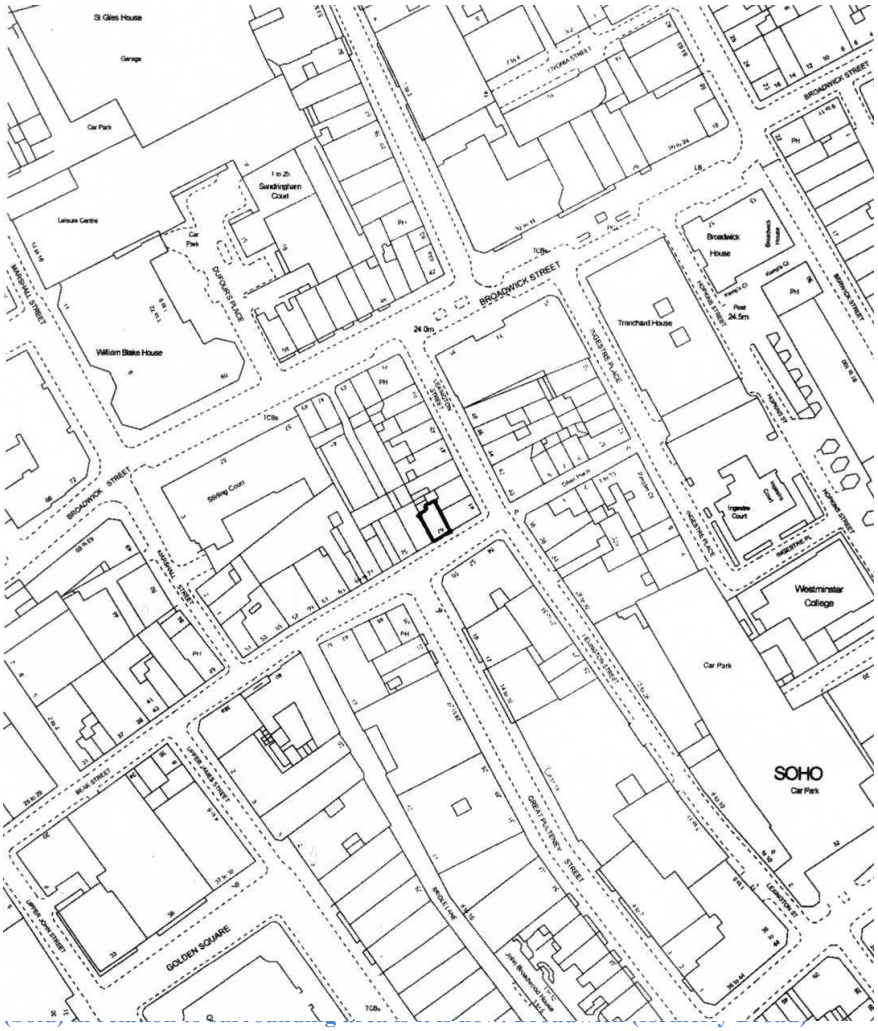
all surfaces in white with hidden lighting to make a very effective gallery space, but one in which there is no reminder at all of the clutter that was once there.

When Wilkes were in the building, the visitors eye was drawn to all the paraphernalia of the gun trade, number 79 was scarcely noticeable and not much of it visible anyway. As a gallery, the eye is drawn to the fabric of the building as much as to the works on display, which, given its age, is perhaps no more than it deserves.



Street, Lexington Street and Golden Square are all visible.

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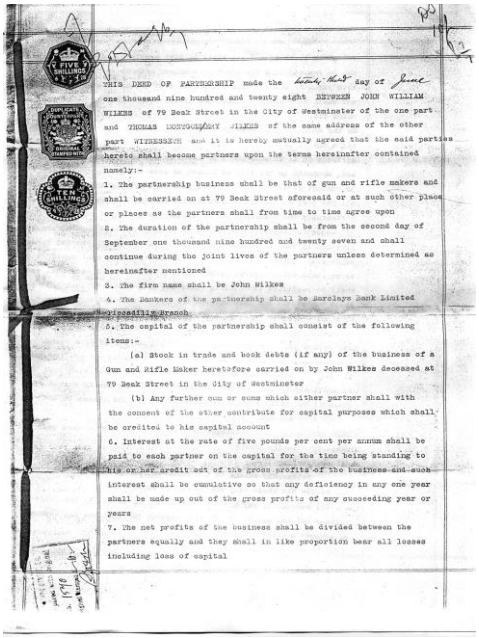
Chapter 7 – Retail Gunmaking 1928 -1939

Partnership

On 23rd June 1928, a little over nine months after their father's death, John William Wilkes and Thomas Montgomery Wilkes signed a partnership agreement giving them equal shares in the firm of John Wilkes. This partnership was to last for nearly forty years, starting at time when the national economy and the gun trade was approaching crisis and ending at another time of impending crisis.

Whilst the two brothers were nominally equal partners, it was the older brother Jack who was the master gunmaker. "Uncle Tom" had been brought up in the trade, but his contribution would be much more in running the back office than working at the bench. Here his obsessive attention to record keeping, whilst probably annoying all those around him, has provided for posterity an extraordinarily detailed account of what went on in the business during those forty years.

Jack was 42 years old when he signed the partnership deed, and at the height of his powers. His reputation from building up a gunmaking business in Birmingham in the midst of the post war hiatus would undoubtedly have reached London. From the evidence we have today, Jack saw himself first as a gunmaker and then as the owner of a gunmaking business. His closest friends were in the workshops of the other London businesses rather than their proprietors in the back offices of their shops. So at Woodward's he was closer to Frank Banister than to Charles Woodward, and at Boss', closer to Bob Henderson than to the Robertson brothers. When the Gunmakers Association proposed to admit the owners of businesses that sold guns and shooting related goods, in addition to the then membership who exclusively made guns, Jack resigned in protest and never rejoined. With hindsight, we can see that Jack's idea of how the Association should be constituted was too traditionalist to have been practical. In 1962 it was to rename itself the Gun Trade Association thereby institutionalising the trend that he had found so objectionable. He was quite consistent in his attitude to those he regarded as outsiders to the trade, holding most dealers at arm's length and sometimes in low regard.



THIS DEED OF PARTNERSHIP made the [illegible] day of June one thousand nine hundred and twenty eight BETWEEN JOHN WILLIAM WILKES of 79 Beak Street in the City of Westminster of the one part and THOMAS MONTGOMERY WILKES of the same address of the other part WITNESSETH and it is hereby mutually agreed that the said parties hereto shall become partners upon the terms hereinafter contained namely:-

1. The partnership business shall be that of gun and rifle makers and shall be carried on at 79 Beak Street aforesaid or at such other place or places as the partners shall from time to time agree upon
2. The duration of the partnership shall be from the second day of September one thousand nine hundred and twenty seven and shall continue during the joint lives of the partners unless determined as hereinafter mentioned
3. The firm name shall be John Wilkes
4. The Bankers of the partnership shall be Barclays Bank Limited Piccadilly Branch
5. The capital of the partnership shall consist of the following items:-
   (a) Stock in trade and book debts (if any) of the business of a Gun and Rifle Maker heretofore carried on by John Wilkes deceased at 79 Beak Street in the City of Westminster
   (b) Any further sum or sums which either partner shall with the consent of the other contribute for capital purposes which shall be credited to his capital account
6. Interest at the rate of five pounds per cent per annum shall be paid to each partner on the capital for the time being standing to his or her credit out of the gross profits of the business and such interest shall be cumulative so that any deficiency in any one year shall be made up out of the gross profits of any succeeding year or years
7. The net profits of the business shall be divided between the partners equally and they shall in like proportion bear all losses including loss of capital

The first page of the agreement executed by the Wilkes brothers in 1928.

He was even known to have a disagreement with Vaughan when the latter challenged his judgement on the state of a pair of Purdey barrels. His son John recalled that in later life Jack was greeted by a visiting dealer whilst waiting in Vaughan's shop. Jack ignored the greeting. The dealer tried twice more with the same result. On the way back to their own shop, John asked his father whether he had heard the greeting, fearing it must be advancing deafness that had led to the snub. He had of course heard all three but he wasn't going to offer even a "Good Morning" to someone he didn't like. He could be just as tough on customers of whom he disapproved. A senior member of the peerage about whom there had been some unflattering publicity was

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ushered out of the shop whilst being called “a pimply faced profligate”. In another incident, Jack was quite willing to risk losing a big customer in a row that followed the discovery that his chauffeur had been making some adjustments to his guns.

The Ledgers

At the time of starting the partnership, Thomas Montgomery Wilkes had been married for about seven years and had two daughters. His relationship with Jack and his family seems to have been mainly centred on their business partnership. Jack’s sons remembered little contact with their uncle and his family outside of the work in the shop.

His ledgers bear some explanation as they are the source of much of the detail in the next few chapters. What follows may seem like a rather tedious exposition of early 20th century small business bookkeeping. The problem that I have encountered in untangling the sixty or so ledgers is that I couldn’t do it until I clearly understood how the ledgers supported the running of the business, and to move beyond that point I found requires knowledge or inference of who many of the key players were and what their role was. Without this groundwork, there is not much more to do with ledgers than to admire the handwriting and the diligence with which they were kept.

A small selection of surviving ledgers. Labels are recently applied to speed navigation. There was little uniformity in the style of ledger used.

As work for other members of the trade was so important to the Wilkes business it is probably best if we start with that as the route into the ledgers. When a gun was passed from a trade customer to Wilkes for work to be done, the customer would attach a card ticket to the guard, pre-printed with their name and address and containing details of the identity of the gun and the work to be done. Wilkes would then examine the gun and give a verbal or written estimate, if the latter by returning the ticket only with the proposed cost written on it. This would be returned by the customer, either accepting or rejecting the estimate. If rejected gun and ticket would be returned; if accepted gun and ticket would go to the workshop. Wilkes kept day books that were chronological logs of all guns coming into the shop and a note of any prices either quoted or subsequently charged if no quotation was requested. The work for Vaughan and Whistler was so extensive that they had their own day books, and quotations for these two were only submitted when something unexpected was encountered, otherwise standard charges applied. All other trade

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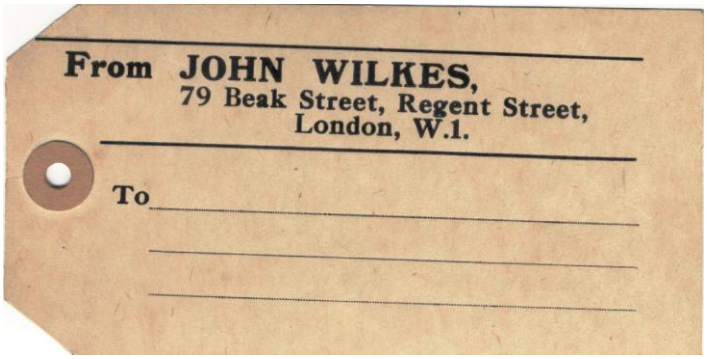
customers had their work coming in recorded in a single day book. Also in this went the records of any orders for new guns or repair work taken in from retail customers, with notes of specification and quoted price.



Like the makers that sent work to them, Wilkes had their own printed labels attached to weapons sent out to others.

The card label was used to identify the gun or the box of its parts whilst in the workshop, and when complete it would go back to the shop. After it had been returned to the customer, an invoice was drawn up, and a copy of this was made in another ledger of invoices. When this was done the corresponding entry in the day book was struck through to ensure that no work went out un-invoiced. Some of the tickets seem to have been retained by Wilkes, others returned as an aide memoire to their customers. The Invoice Ledger has notes of when the invoice was sent and of any reminders. The third ledger on this side of the business was an Accounts Receivable ledger, an alphabetically indexed set of accounts; one page or sometimes more per customer, on which all their invoices were listed and all payments from them recorded. Also recorded were any credits for firearms traded in. Customers in the thirties and beyond were sometimes quite slow in paying accounts and sometimes did so in instalments that could cover multiple invoices, so this means of tracking totals owing and amounts paid was a necessity of the times.

The supply side of the business was less clearly documented in ledgers. Orders were usually placed by the ticketing system in cases when Wilkes were sending out an incomplete gun for further work, or otherwise by letter in which case a copy was kept. All of these would result in a bill of some sort, and where this was a formal invoice, a copy was transcribed into an invoice ledger. This is a rich source of the trade prices for work at the time, and also an important way of identifying some of the suppliers that were being used. Untangling this has been helped by the fact that quite often the invoice is referenced by the number of the gun being worked on. But this data is incomplete. As an example Wilkes would send perhaps ten or more jobs a month to one of the barrel filers that they used. Normally this would appear in the invoice ledger as “Ten Tickets” and a total price. At another level Wilkes periodically employed people to work on piecework rates in the shop. So for George Mealey, the actioner, we have some invoices prior to his moving in to Beak Street which are itemised, but once he is working in the shop, we know how much he was paid each week, but not what he did for that wage. Much of this missing data, as well as order letters, the tickets for incoming work, customer correspondence and utility bills were in the annual bundles that Uncle Tom stored in the cellar. Backing up the order ledger is an Accounts Payable ledger that records by supplier, all the invoices owing as well as pages for cash disbursements, wages, building costs, etc. so this book contains all the costs associated with the business. It also contains the annual accounts of the partnership for all years from 1928 to 1967, showing turnover and profit distributable to the partners.

The Gun Trade in the Depression

The UK economy had been struggling to recover after the First World War. A surge in the couple of years immediately after the war had been overtaken by prolonged deflationary pressures for most of the 1920s. The General Strike in May 1926 had been a symptom of this, but the pressures

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continued. Those gunmakers with the channels to exploit the US market had been successful in maintaining production, but the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed it, brought this market to an effective standstill, and its global reverberations meant that there were few alternative markets open. The effect that this had on the London trade was far from uniform and varied a lot by maker.

Boss' production[14] in the 1920s was if anything slightly higher than in the Edwardian era, and although it fell away a bit in the early 1930s, it remained more or less flat during the period between 1900 and 1940 apart from the war years themselves. Purdey's[16] on the other hand saw their production at the lowest point fall to about a third of the levels at the turn of the century and had to face the difficult decision of laying off staff in the early 1930s. By contrast Robert Churchill[19], the consummate marketer of his products, seems to have enjoyed a steady rise in business throughout the twenties and thirties. Perhaps the starkest indicator lies in Grant and Lang's late thirties letter head which lists the six long established gunmaking businesses, all of whom had been trading independently at the end of the first war, that had collapsed into just this one firm by the start of the second.

Retail prices in the wider economy fell by about 15% between 1928 and 1934, only returning to their levels at the start of the period by 1939. Thereafter there was a surge in inflation caused by the war. Wages were slightly more buoyant than prices and by the start of the war were running about 10% ahead of their 1928 levels. This encouraged a steady stream of small price rises in guns in the second half of the thirties as makers struggled to maintain profitability with production volumes below capacity and higher wages. In assessing the large amounts of price related information in the material that follows, it is a good approximation, however, to assume prices remained roughly constant through this period.

The Wilkes Business

The Wilkes business was by no means immune from these pressures. As the tabulation below shows the overall production of Wilkes guns never reached the level of about 100 a year that it was immediately prior to the 1914 war, but the numerical percentage of retail sales, which had never previously been above 20%, was to rise to 33%. This figure, based on numbers of guns and rifles, understates the value of retail business because a great many of these sales in the 1930s were to be of high quality London finished guns.

Period	Average Production per year	Average retail sales per year
1915 - 1919	35	2
1920 - 1924	63	3
1925 - 1929	33	4
1930 - 1934	44	12
1934 - 1939	42	14

Appendix 3A shows the turnover and profit by year during this period, and the proportion of turnover made up by trade and retail sales, turnover including repair work, sales of new and reconditioned firearms and of sundries. Turnover in the year to 31st August 1928, the first year the firm was under the management of the next generation, was £2,629. This was to rise to over £4,000 in 1935-37. The proportion of sales accounted for by firearms, outwork and repairs to

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other members of the trade, including dealers, accounted for 80% of business in 1928, and was to fall to about 40% of business a decade later. So the story of the 1930s is one of rebalancing the business towards retail customers. A curious feature is that some of the most prosperous years for Wilkes in the period between the wars were the early thirties when much of the rest of the trade was in crisis. There will be pointers in the story that unfolds as to why this might have been.

The profits of the business, which were shared equally between the two brothers, were slightly more erratic than the turnover, averaging about £800 over the 12 years and exceeding £1,000 in three of them; 1930, 1936 and 1937. Jack and Tom were therefore earning on average about £8 per week each from the business in the 1930s. To give this some context, Dallas in his book on Purdey[16] publishes their wage book for March 1936. Fewer than 20% of their trained craftsmen earned more than £5 per week, and Ernest Lawrence, their much admired factory manager, was earning £10. So, in running his own business, Jack was probably doing as well as, if not a little better than, his peers in the trade who were employed by the larger makers. The family was drawing a little more from the business because throughout the period and up to her death in 1943, the firm was paying a steadily increasing pension, which averaged about £3 per week, to Jack and Tom's mother, Louisa Wilkes.

There was a constant flow of work from Vaughan who was invoiced between £1400 and £2000 per year every year in the period apart from a single dip in 1932. The other customers giving Wilkes trade work were periodically changing. As an example, for many years they had been undertaking a steady but modest stream of trade repair work for the London arm of George Gibbs, the renowned Bristol based gun and rifle maker, who had set up a branch in Savile Row in 1906. When Gibbs left London in 1929 this stream dried up and a small outstanding debt in Wilkes' books was written off. Wilkes' trade customers, whilst remaining loyal over periods of several years, would come and go in the decades that followed, many of them only ceasing to be customers when they themselves went out of business.

The layoffs that Purdey had to make were also made by some other makers in both London and Birmingham. In many of the maker's workshops, the craftsmen were employed on piece work rates, so a stocker would be paid for stocking a gun if his normal employer had one that needed stocking, but if the work wasn't there the stocker would be free to take on work from someone else. Not all of the men worked in their employer's workshops, some worked in their own premises or they may have hired a bench in someone else's workshop. Wilkes employed people on three different arrangements. Some were paid a fixed wage to work regularly in the shop, some were paid a wage, again to work in the shop, but which varied according to how much work they did, and others, particularly those that worked for other makers for much of the time, were paid by the job and there is usually an itemised invoice for this work that specifies the job and the amount charged for it.

The advantage that Wilkes had in the 1930 was that they had access to master men who in more prosperous times would have been fully employed by their main employer. So we will find Wilkes using, in addition to those on their payroll, stockers who normally worked for Woodward, Rigby, Atkin and Watson Bros, actioners who worked for Grant & Lang and Webley & Scott, and barrel filers that worked for Grant & Lang, Woodward, and Churchill. And backing all of this up were the Birmingham makers that they used regularly to supply finished guns who were always willing to take on some step in the making up a gun.

The flexibility that this allowed enabled Wilkes to turn out during the depression work that was of best London quality at prices below the main stream makers. As we shall see, Wilkes manufacturing costs were lower than his competitors, but with no separate front shop to fund, his

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selling prices were substantially below those needed by the makers with more prestigious premises. And once word got round, he soon had as many customers as he could cope with, some of them coming to him after deserting more well-known names.

His customers in the thirties were dominated by a few names, individuals or families who had multiple guns made for them. For some of these the firm also provided a great many other services; supplying ammunition and equipment, packing and shipping, maintaining and even cleaning firearms after shooting. Wilkes' financial year ran to the end of August and whilst many customers were invoiced shortly after delivery, a few of these larger customers received annual accounts, although often these were offset by payments on account. There were smaller customers as well, but not on a scale that would remove the firm's dependence on a few individuals. Whilst bad debt problems do not seem to have had much impact, some customers were slow to pay and there are a couple of instances where it appears that customers that owed money had gone under during the depression, and arrangements then had to be made to clear their debts.

This best quality boxlock 10174 was delivered London proved and fully finished by Harper in March 1928 for £25. It has chopper lump barrels, rocker safe and all the other attributes of the best of its type. In front of its proof marks, Wilkes have impressed an occasionally used circular trade stamp. The gun was sold to a retail customer in May of the same year in a case with cover for £60, making this one of the most expensive boxlocks sold by Wilkes in the inter war years. The customer was not able to settle his account until 1931.

Trade Work

Work for the trade in the late twenties started to become more varied. There was still the steady stream of repairs and alterations, some of them coming from sources other than the regular supply from Vaughan. But Vaughan's business was still critical to Wilkes survival. To take just one month at random, in January 1928 Vaughan sent round 42 jobs in all, that ranged from boiling out eight rifle barrels for a shilling each, to doing up and sometimes reproofing 17 guns for between £2 and £3 per gun, to re-barrelling two guns at £6/10/0 and £8/10/0 each and to restocking and doing up a Holland Royal for £10/0/0. In all the month's work was billed for about £80 and that was without any new guns for retail sale.

There were some interesting sales of component parts. The barrel filer George Lane who, at the time was working from 35 Grosvenor Mews in Mayfair, bought off Wilkes 3 dozen extension forgings, 4 dozen lumps, 2 dozen bottom ribs and half a dozen fullered (*i.e.* sunken) top ribs for £3/10/0 and a pair of 16 bore tubes for 10 shillings. In January 1928, Holloway & Naughton were sold 21 pairs of damascus tubes, all 32" long and in 12, 16 and 20 bore sizes, for £1 a pair.

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Trade work for Rigby's which was well underway in Broad Street since 1924, continued from Beak Street until 1931, by which time Wilkes had supplied Rigby's in the preceding seven years with 28 A&D fully finished guns and one rifle, 40 barrels and actions of which 12 were sidelocks and 4 were boxlock double rifles, and they had made up into shooting state a further 24 gun actions supplied by Rigby. It was John Harper that Wilkes were employing to do much of this work, typically Harper's invoices being marked up by between 30 and 50% before being passed on to Rigby's. Wilkes in return were making sure the orders were placed where they would be fulfilled on time and to the right quality, so the arrangement allowed Rigby's access to the best the Birmingham trade had to offer without taking up their time organising it. After 1931 outwork for Rigby was to be only occasional until the mid-1950s when it would resume significantly.

The move to Beak Street brought Wilkes even closer to Boss' factory in Lexington Street which was less than 100 yards away. Boss appears to have had more work than they could cope with in their workshop in the late twenties, so Wilkes picked up some jobs that would have taken men off making new guns. In 1928, they re-stocked a pair of highly cast Boss guns 6801 and 6802 after setting the work straight, charging Boss £13 for the job, but it was John Harper that actually did the work, charging Wilkes £8/15/0 for it. A few weeks later Boss sent them three pairs of well cast-off Evans guns for the same re-setting of the work and re- stocking, for which the bill was £32, again two of the jobs actually being done by Harper. Two more restocking jobs on Boss guns 4174 and 4308 came in later in 1928 and were £5/10/0 each. When near Christmas that year Boss asked them to restock a Lefever Arms Co gun, Wilkes charged them £2 and Boss seem to have thought it was too little and added 5 shillings to the account.

Henry Atkin was supplied with two boxlock double rifles and a gun, all named and numbered. W.J. Jeffery, who had now moved to Golden Square, a couple of minutes walk away, was sending round a steady stream of small jobs. And even Woodward asked Wilkes to supply the occasional boxlock gun, although at least one of these was returned when found to be "unsuitable". Hobson & Sons were a military clothing outfitters and contractors with a warehouse in Lexington Street, and there was a steady business flowing from them averaging about £50 a year until 1932 including the occasional gun finished with Hobson's name on it. And finally, to complete the picture of the trade work at the end of the 1920s there was still steady business with Whistler, averaging about £250 a year around 1930 and still providing repair work and taking some new Wilkes guns for retail sale.

Between 1928 and 1932 there was a steady stream of sales to Vaughan and Whistler of new, ordinary grade, boxlock guns and, with the exception of two or three from Holloway & Naughton, all of these until 1929 came from Harper. The dealers were pandering to fashion and the trend made popular by Churchill to shorter barrels, which had started in 1926, had, by 1929, become a flood. Blocks of guns in the register are shown as being made in Birmingham with 25" and 26" barrels.

Gun 13876 was one of the medium quality boxlocks supplied by Bayliss, this one a 16 bore ejector supplied in 1933. It has a point finished stock, rocker safe, Scott spindle and screwed crosspin. It came into the shop at £12/10/0 and went to Vaughan for £17/10/0.

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In July 1929 Wilkes ordered a fully finished 12 bore boxlock ejector gun from a new supplier, A.E. Bayliss. We don't know why he chose to consider another supplier than Harper, with whom he was placing an enormous amount of work at the time. Alongside supplying new guns in various states of finish, Harper was also taking on a steady stream of repair jobs, some of them quite major. The Bayliss gun was numbered 10370 and was a good fully engraved boxlock with rocker safe, ball and bead fences, Scott spindle, no extension and Anson rod fore-end. It came in at £12/10/0 and was sold to Vaughan for £17/10/0, presumably then to be retailed for around £25/0/0. It was the first of many to be supplied by Bayliss who would be one of Wilkes' major suppliers in the 1930s.

A.E.Bayliss, Son & Co

Albert Ernest Bayliss was born in Birmingham in 1866, the youngest son of Oliver Bayliss who, at the time, ran a barrel making business in Legge Street. In the 1871 census, Oliver describes himself as employing 3 men and 2 boys. The Bayliss family name was widely represented in the nineteenth century Birmingham gun trade. Nigel Brown[8] lists no fewer than 29 firms and individuals with the name, or close variants of it, trading in and around the city between 1800 and 1950. Many were, like Oliver, barrel makers, but several other gunmaking trades were practiced by the Bayliss family as well. How these various individuals were related would be a study in its own right. This story concerns just one branch of the family.

Oliver was 50 years old when Albert was born. Albert had an older brother Joseph, born in 1861, who followed his father into the barrel making business, but Oliver died in 1879 when Albert was 14, so the younger son was trained as a finisher, by whom we do not know. Joseph is reported in the 1891 census as married and still working as a barrel maker, but thereafter I can find no record either of his death or his appearance in subsequent census returns, It is possible he emigrated, but he plays no further part in the story. Albert married and had a son Percival born in 1889 and four daughters, and in both 1901 and 1911 census returns describes himself as a sporting gun finisher working on his own account, so he was an outworker in the trade. By 1911 Percy is just married at age 22 and a "Gun worker" living with his parents-in-law in the Nichells area of Birmingham. Brown records that between 1915 and 1920 A.E. Bayliss traded from the back of 9 Sand St in the St Mary's area in the city.

In 1920, when Jack Wilkes came to Birmingham to bring together a group of trained craftsmen to restart production of sporting guns for the London trade after the War, it is possible that Albert and perhaps also Percival and their firm were part of the team he assembled. The reason for so thinking is that Jack's son John believed that the firm of A.E. Bayliss took over the team that Jack had working for him when Wilkes decided to close their Birmingham operation to allow Jack to take over the running of the London arm of the business around 1923. In 1921 the Bayliss family business changed name to A.E. Bayliss, Son & Co, trading from the same address, indicating that Percy was also involved, and in 1927 it became A.E Bayliss & Co. Albert Bayliss died in 1950 at the age of 85. It is possible that this final name change marked his retirement from the firm. Brown also reports Percy Bayliss trading from 43 Loveday St circa 1926 but what he did from this address is not clear.

Bayliss made a broad range of guns typical of the Birmingham trade. Their retail catalogue of 1925 shows 25 different models of gun ranging from basic hammer guns and boxlock non-

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ejectors through to top quality boxlocks with elaborate decoration and a best sidelock, and including special purpose guns like pigeon and wildfowling models. Those sold from this catalogue would have borne their own name, but much of their production ended up with the names of others on them, the best of these being very good and easily mistaken for London made guns. Wilkes drew on Bayliss to supply guns in a range of grades starting in 1929, and from then through to the early 1940s the firm supplied some 250 guns to Wilkes. Although some were fairly basic, many were of good quality and quite a few of these Wilkes named guns ended up being retailed by James Purdey and Sons.

Wilkes did a brisk business in lower grade weapons from Bayliss. This 20 bore non-ejector, 13696, with tumbler lever work was sold to Vaughan for £9/10/0 in 1933.

After the Second World War, the firm of A.E. Bayliss was absorbed into A.A.Brown & Sons, the last gun made bearing the name being finished in 1955. Percy Bayliss died in Wales in 1978 aged 89.

J. Purdey and Sons Ltd

There was one new and very significant trade customer in the 1930s. In 1934 Tom Purdey paid a visit to the shop to discuss a proposition with Jack. Purdey's were getting a number of enquiries from customers wanting to buy new guns who, in the aftermath of the depression, could not afford the £120 or so that the most basic new Purdey would cost. They didn't want to turn these customers away, nor did they want to put their name on lesser guns, so the proposal to Wilkes was that he supply Purdey with good boxlocks bearing Wilkes name, which Purdey would retail.

12 bore 13991 was sold to Purdey in July 1937 for £20. It was made by Bayliss to pair with an earlier gun, 13705 that had been sold to them in March 1935. 13705 had a slightly different pedigree; having been made up in the shop by Mealey to the barrel and action stage and then stocked and finished by Bayliss. Unusually, 13991 was fitted with a best tailpipe

Purdey had sold boxlocks bearing their own name that were made up for them in Birmingham before the turn of the century but had abandoned the practice because it was devaluing their brand. The first supplied by Wilkes under this new arrangement was in 1934, and in the six years or so thereafter they went on to supply 32 such guns for Purdey to sell. Details of these guns are in Appendix 4 which also serves to give an indication of the types of information that Wilkes recorded in the register in the 30s. Whilst most came from Bayliss, usually wholly made by them,

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eight were either made up in the shop or sourced from Harper. Half the guns supplied were in 20 bore, nine in 12 bore, two each of 16 and 28 bores, and 3 in .410.

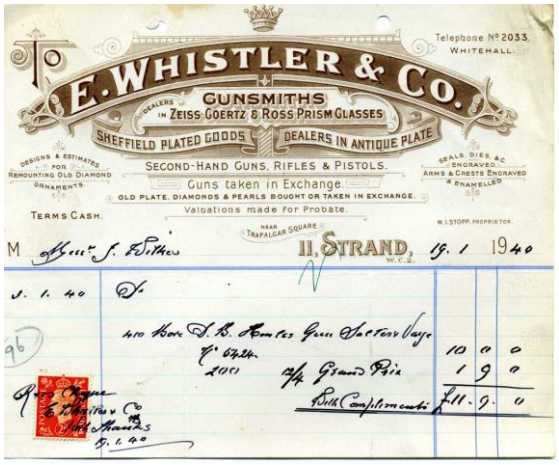
There was nothing to distinguish the guns that Wilkes sold to Purdey from those that sold through other channels. One of the last guns of these was this 410 ejector, 15083, made by Bayliss in 1940. It came into the shop at £17 and sold at auction in 2002 for a hammer price of £4,000.

Guns that Wilkes intended for Vaughan were normally supplied with standard measurements, the exception being those that were made to order. Those for Purdey were all ordered to bespoke measurements and with different specifications. The arrangement seems to have been very satisfactory, there were one or two instances where guns came back quite quickly to have defects corrected, which were done free of charge, and there were some special requests, like pairing or fitting pads, which were charged extra.

These were almost all attractive middle of the range boxlocks that were supplied to Wilkes for £14 or slightly less and sold on to Purdey for £18. We don't know for how much they retailed them. Purdey seem to have sold a canvas case with some of these guns because when they have come up for sale in recent years, some have been in a Purdey labelled case. All the time I was visiting Wilkes shop in the latter years of the century there was a story often repeated that Purdey had overlooked paying one of the invoices for some of these guns and that the money was still outstanding. I approached the ledgers expecting to find confirmation of this, but there is no such evidence. The ledgers reveal that Purdey paid promptly and in full for all of the 32 guns that were marked out to them. The arrangement petered out when the trade was overtaken by the war in the early 1940s and did not resume after it.

Dealer Sales

By 1932 other trade work was in serious decline with only Vaughan keeping up a steady flow of business, and it would stay that way until the trade was overtaken by war work. So much of the rest of this chapter is devoted to the making of guns for the retail market.



A Whistler invoice from 1940 still showing the flamboyance of an earlier age

In the period covered by this chapter, 1927-1940, John Wilkes produced about 530 guns and just four double rifles. Of these about 300 were sold to Vaughan, 45 to Whistler and 36 to other members of the trade. 150 were sold directly to retail customers, and 115 were made up to some extent in London. Wilkes business was therefore still achieving much of its volume by buying finished and named guns in Birmingham and selling them mostly through dealer channels. But the margins on this were usually quite modest especially on the lower grades of gun where a 25% mark-up was normal for Vaughan; to other trade customers it was a fraction more. For out of the ordinary firearms the mark-up was higher. For example, two identical Harper made boxlock ejector double .470 rifles were bought in at £29 in 1928; one, 10150, was then sold to Vaughan for £42/10/0, the other,

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10178, to Henry Atkin for £47/10/0 with an extra £1/10/0 charged for shooting and supplying the sample target. For higher quality guns, well made sidelocks in particular, the margin was sometimes higher, but not always. Vaughan was sold 6 Harper made sidelocks in 1930, 2 pairs and 2 singles. Wilkes paid £28 per gun for them and sold them to Vaughan for £35. These were good guns, good enough for one of the pairs to sell at auction in 2007 for a hammer price of £12,000.

The 25% mark-up was not quite the easy money it appeared to be as it was Wilkes whose name on the gun and it was therefore their reputation that was at risk and their responsibility to fix anything that went wrong. The attraction of more retail customers made sense from a business perspective as it gave Wilkes a bigger mark-up and it provided the opportunity for sales of associated accessories like cases and ammunition. Retail sale mark-ups were typically of the order of 40-70%, but most of these were guns that were to some degree customised so their costs coming into the shop were not quite as clear cut as those that were bought in ready finished for onward sale to the dealers. As an example of a gun that passed straight through to a retail customer, a plain Webley & Scott Fig 600 2" chambered gun was bought in 1937 for £13 and sold retail in a case with accessories for £25. The case would have cost about £2, so the mark-up on both together was 66%.

Wilkes sold several good quality sidelocks to Vaughan in the late 1920s and early 1930s. This pair, 10394/5, are 20 bores with chopper lump barrels. They were made by Harper, London proved and sold to Vaughan for £70 for the pair in 1933.

The most interesting group of guns are those that were made up to order for customers, just over 100 in all. The larger makers with their factories had highly developed procedures for making guns so that during its manufacture the gun would pass through a predictable path from one specialist worker to the next. There is a beautifully concise article in the Shooting Sportsman where David Trevallion describes this process at Purdey's in the 1950s, and similar accounts could have been written of all the other large factory operations. But the process at Wilkes in the 1930s was nothing like that. No two guns followed the same path in their manufacture. Even when pairs were made, it was sometimes the case that one gun of the pair would have a slightly different pedigree to the other. Rather than try to describe the method of making of these guns,

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there are a few threads that will allow us to explore the important aspects of the way the firm worked without getting mired in lots of repetitive detail.

In the 1930s Wilkes used in their gun cases an elegant off-white card trade label with a heavily embossed border.

Gentlemen's Outfitters

About 15% of the guns that Wilkes made in London in the late twenties and thirties were destined for the owners of another family business, Horne Bros. In the space of 14 years, seven members of the family that gave this tailoring and outfitting business its name would commission from Wilkes a total of 18 guns. Additionally, they asked Wilkes to provide a whole range of other shooting accessories, extending from predictable items like ammunition through to the bizarre, like biscuit tins.

The Horne Family

Horne Brothers was a gentleman's outfitters and livery tailors founded in the late nineteenth century by two brothers, one of whom, Frederick N Horne was to develop a serious interest in shooting. Frederick Horne, who was born in 1863, married in about 1893 and had a large family of five sons and a daughter, all of whom would inherit their father's interest in shooting. In 1900 the firm had a shop in The Strand, but expanded rapidly in the Edwardian era. Their success may be gauged by Frederick's entry in the 1911 census, which reports him as living at Colley Manor, a large house on a hilltop of the North Downs above Reigate in Surrey, with his wife and children and seven live-in domestic staff. By 1927 Frederick had moved to Tonbridge in Kent and the family firm had eight branches in the City and another eight in the West End as well as many others in major towns across the UK. Horne Bros made a point wherever possible of owning the freehold to their shops and selecting only those on corner sites in major thoroughfares. Their head offices were at 10 Newman Street, a road running north from Oxford Street about half a mile from the Beak Street shop of John Wilkes.

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In the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, Frederick Horne and each of his children had separate accounts with Wilkes. Collectively the Horne family were by some margin Wilkes' largest retail customer in this period. Apart from Frederick, his sons George (b 1900), Frank (b 1894) and Cecil (b 1904) were all major customers. Starting with a gun made for George Horne in 1927, the family went on to have 18 guns made for them by Wilkes, all London finished and most in some way unusual. George, who was a keen wildfowler, was to account for almost half the family's business with Wilkes including no fewer than eight new guns. There was a steady stream of other business flowing from them, they were constantly requesting alterations and adjustments to their guns as well as buying and selling guns of other makes, some but not all through Wilkes, and these in turn kept coming in for maintenance and adjustment. From the numbers of guns they brought in for repair, the family seems to have owned and regularly used a great many guns, running into hundreds. Maintaining a record of which job came from which family member seems to have been a challenge – entries where invoices are moved in Wilkes' accounts between the siblings are quite common. Confusion was made more likely as most of them used the Newman Street office address for their invoices.

After the war the surviving members of the family continued to be regular customers until the 1970s, with Cecil's son Graham also becoming a customer in the late 60s. Horne Bros continued to prosper through the fifties and sixties, but mass market tailoring was becoming increasingly competitive. The firm was taken over by the retailing conglomerate Sears Group in the 1980s, only to be bought back by its directors in the early 1990s, but then went into administration two years later in 1993, at which time it still had 37 retail shops.

Sometime before 1926 Frank Horne, one of the sons of the owner of Horne Bros, had purchased gun 9150, which was one of the 32" barrelled non-ejectors that Wilkes had made in 1922, this particular one having been sold originally to Vaughan. In 1926 he brought it in to the shop to have the barrels reduced to 25", with several other alterations to rib and guard for a total of £4/6/0. A couple of years later he was to have a new pair of interchangeable 27" barrels fitted for £12/10/0. This was one of the earliest contacts between the Horne family and John Wilkes. The first gun made specifically for the family was for Frank's brother George N Horne, an inveterate wildfowler, in April 1927 when George was about 27.

The gun that he ordered was 10140, an extraordinary thing described in the "Bore" column of the register as a "Magnum 8/12 bore". It was in fact a very heavily made 12 bore, chambered for 3¼" cases that was proved to shoot an 8 bore load of 2½ oz of shot. It had 30" chopper lump barrels with a high rib parallel to the bore, the barrels alone weighing just over 6lbs, and the total gun 11½lbs. It was an A&D non-ejector with lever forepart and draw bolt extension, gilded lock work and the stock had side plates, a high comb, a metal heel plate and full pistol hand. Harper made up the action and barrels and it was stocked and finished in London by Wilkes, and engraved by Kell. Unfortunately there is no record of how much George Horne was charged as it was sold a matter of weeks before the surviving invoice ledgers begin, but it is likely to have been around £60 to £70.

Within four months of George taking delivery of his gun, his brothers Cecil and Frank had both brought in a few guns each for work such as adjustments to pulls and stock measurements, these ranging in quality from a pair of Woodwards through to an air rifle. In early 1928 Frank took delivery of 10181, an A&D gun that was made to the barrel and action stage in London and then sent to Harper for finishing, with special engraving and inlaying. It also had a high rib, a feature of many guns made for the Hornes around this time. It was sold to Frank for £37/10/0 in a case. George was soon back. Amid an order for some big bore reloading consumables are some more unusual items; 2 burnishers in handles for 4 shillings and a single 12 bore barrel forging for 12/6. In mid-1928 he ordered 2lb lots of two different punt gun powders and a large supply of 1 3/16" wads, whilst at the same time buying, restocking and fitting a high rib to a 28 bore McNaughton.

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George was not shy about bringing a new gun back for alterations if it didn't appear to work for him, as what happened to the 8/12 bore would demonstrate. Just over a year after he bought it, 10140 was back for boring out and reproving as a 10 bore, chambered and proved for the 3" cartridge. Immediately after, it was back again to have the stock set up 1/8". A few weeks later it was in for restocking, the new stock and re-boring together costing £12/10/0. At the same time, Wilkes were asked to engrave two pairs of cuff links, which they did for 8 shillings each, and they also supplied an off-the-shelf double .410, 10135, for £9/10/0. Later in the year the new stock on 10140 was set up slightly and it then came back a few days later for shortening by 3/16" and refitting of the heel plate. By this rather circuitous route Wilkes had just made their first 10 bore in nearly 35 years in business; it would be another 60 years before they made the next.

Also in mid-1928 Frederick N Horne, the father of George and his brothers made his first appearance, bringing in a German U&O and a Browning automatic gun for repairs. Frank then has an invoice for £31 for work on 13 guns, including fitting high ribs, roll-over combs and the like. Later still in 1928 Frederick brought in a Boswell for some major mechanical repairs to lock work and ejectors and George bought 56lbs of SSG shot and a length behind, the name the trade gives to the gauge used for measuring stock lengths, for £1/7/6. In December 1928, the fourth sibling, Graham S Horne took delivery of a 12 bore single trigger sidelock ejector with Purdey pattern engraving for £55. This gun, 10319, was made up in London by Harry Caden and sold to Wilkes in the white for £40 with Wilkes then finishing it, so their margin on it was rather slim. Less than a year later it was back to have the fore end lengthened and restocked for £3/15/0.

Within a week, the fifth brother, Leslie F Horne, made his first appearance requesting that the stock of the No 2 gun of a pair of Boss U&O be altered to match exactly the No1, which presumably had been subjected to some previous alterations somewhere else. In March 1929 Graham paid a visit arranged by Wilkes to the shooting grounds and had 300 cartridges and clays for £4/7/0. Wilkes used two grounds around this time; Harrison & Hussey's Albemarle grounds in south east London, and Boss's Regent Ground in north London, the choice seemingly depending on the customer's convenience. Frank brought in a cigarette case for repair, polishing and engraving for £2/7/6. Gunmakers are, after all, expected to be able to do just about anything mechanical.

In July 1929, George Horne took delivery of a Wilkes 12 bore sidelock ejector fitted with 3" chambered barrels, with an extra pair of 2½" chambered barrels. Without a case this gun was sold for £75. At that price this would have been one of Wilkes second quality guns. There is no entry in the register for this gun but the initials GNH are pencilled in against the number and the only transactions relate to regulating the shooting and blacking down the barrels, so there is no record of where this gun came from. It is most likely one that had been in stock for a few years. Before the end of the year it was back for restocking, the fitting of a new solid spur guard, and different sights on both barrels, an expensive job in all at £14/5/0.

The ledgers go on like this throughout the next decade, with members of the family continually bringing in work, and constantly having their guns altered. Perhaps there is a certain element of sibling rivalry detectable. If one brother has high ribs fitted the others follow suit, likewise with roll-over combs, intermediate sights on the barrels and solid spur guards. Even with the purchase of burnishers, after George bought his two, Frank and Cecil both followed suit. For Wilkes it must have been confusing and probably frustrating; having put their all into making something to meet a customer's special requirements, only to the be asked to make major alterations would have required some lip biting! But it was also profitable, which may have helped them deal with the frustration. It is reminiscent of the relationship that, at the turn of the 18th century, Peter

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Hawker described himself as having with the master gunmaker Joe Manton. When first I read of this I remember wondering if Manton found their interactions as engaging as Hawker clearly did.

Focussing again on the guns the family had made; in November 1930 Frank and George took two consecutively numbered (10550/51) and identical boxlocks differing only in stock measurements. Both had 25" barrels and Churchill ribs, made from BSA chopper lump tubes. These were made up by Walter Crathorn, a Birmingham based filer who was used widely by the London trade. The tubes cost £1/10/0 a pair and Crathorn made them up for another £1/15/0. Bayliss then actioned and stocked them for £13/5/0 per gun sending them back to London for Kell to engrave them with Baker pattern scroll for £3 each. This pattern was an almost complete covering of medium scrolls. The two Horne brothers were then charged £35 per gun.

The next gun in the register 10552, was another one for Frank Horne, this time a best sidelock pigeon gun with 27" Vickers chopper lump tubes that were made up by Crathorn for £3. Bob Henderson supplied the action machining for £3/15/0. Roly Bloomer then made up the action and supplied the furniture for £13/10/0, Harper stocked it and fitted pad and oval for £5/10/0, and it was then sent to London where Kell engraved it in the Boss pattern for £4/10/0 before going back to Bloomer for hardening and finishing for another £3/8/0. Horne bought it at the end of 1930 for £80. Allowing a few extra costs, this gun cost less than £40 to build, and was sold with 100% margin, perhaps slightly over. An equivalent gun from Grant & Lang at this time would have cost around £60 to build[17] and would have sold for about £110.

Frank Horne's best sidelock 10552. Engraved by Kell it had a typical monogram of the owner's initials on the lever.

The next gun in the number sequence for the Hornes was one that Graham had ordered in 1928. It was sold at about the same time as the last gun described but had been in construction for quite a while longer. The reason for this was that 11230 was a best quality double barrelled 8 bore sidelock ejector. Large bore guns had been made by many London makers either side of the turn of the century. A few of these had been made up in their factories alongside game and pigeon guns, but a great many more were bought in completely or partly finished from the Birmingham trade where makers like Tolley had specialised in their production. With their popularity in decline, few London makers in the 1930s were offering 8 bores in their catalogues.

11230 was chambered for the 4" cartridge, proved for 2¾oz shot and weighed in at 13½ lbs. Because just about everything for it had to be made specially, its manufacture left a clearer paper trail than for any other gun made in the period. The tabulation below may help to explain that.

The gun was sold to George Horne in January 1931 in its case with a cleaning rod for £132/15/0. It came back periodically, George Horne eventually deciding to sell it in 1964. It was sold then for £700, with Wilkes taking a £50 commission from Horne on the sale, the buyer having his own initials put on the gun and case to replace those of its first owner. John Wilkes always regretted they had not bought the gun back in and kept it; it was one of their proudest achievements. After the war, Holland & Holland were asked by a customer to make a similar gun. Knowing that Wilkes was one of the few firms in London to have turned one out within living memory,

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Holland's approached them to ask if they could borrow the drawings that had been used. This caused much amusement as of course the whole gun had been designed in what Bob Henderson would have called the mind's eye, there was nothing on paper at all.

Date	Supplier	Task	Price
21/04/1928	Vickers	Supply 1 pair chopper lump 8 bore tubes	£5/10/0
30/11/1928	Bill Wakefield	Filing pair of 8 bore barrels	£6/10/0
14/10/1929	Roly Bloomer	Supply pair 8 bore locks	£3/10/0
20/01/1930	Bob Henderson	Supply pair 8 bore extractors	£0/2/6
19/02/1930	Walter Crathorn	Chambering	£0/5/0
31/03/1930	Boss & Co	Supplying action and fore end forgings	£1/17/0
31/03/1930	Boss & Co	Machining action	£2/4/0
31/03/1930	Boss & Co	Machining fore end	£0/8/0
16/04/1930	Roly Bloomer	Making up action and barrels, ejectors and lever forepart from materials supplied	£20/0/0
26/06/1930	Walter Crathorn	Finish boring barrels	£0/16/0
30/07/1930	A.E. Bayliss	Stocking, Fitting iron heel plate, hand cap, tail pipe and oval	£7/10/0
27/08/1930	Walter Crathorn	Smoothing barrels and file cutting rib	£1/0/0
30/09/1930	Henry Kell	Engraving Baker pattern scroll	£5/5/6
22/11/1930	Roly Bloomer	Stripping, freeing and finishing	£3/3/0
6/11/1930	Philip Lewey	Making case	£3/12/6
		Total identifiable cost	**£61/13/6**

Also at the end of 1930 Cecil had a best sidelock pigeon gun, 12286, made for him. This gun had chopper lump barrels by Crathorn, was actioned by Bloomer and engraved by Kell, this time in the Holland & Holland pattern. It was sold to Horne for £80. In 1943 he offered to sell it back to the firm and was paid £60 for it. In mid-1931 Graham Horne had a best 26" barrelled light boxlock made for him, 13410. Crathorn made up the barrels and Bloomer then made up the gun, fitting a Webley selective single trigger and stocking it with a blank supplied by Wilkes. Kell engraved it with game and scroll. It was sold for £45 which was to become their standard price for the best boxlock in the 1930s. Subsequently it was passed on to Frank, who in 1934 had it converted to double trigger and restocked to pair with a gun that was being made for him. But before then, Frank had made for him another very light 12 bore best boxlock weighing under 6lbs, again based on 27" Crathorn filed chopper lump barrels and a Bloomer made action, and engraved to "Kell design No 1". This gun 13537 was sold to Frank for £40.

Thus far the Horne Bros proprietor, Frederick N Horne, had not had any guns made for him, his business had been confined to repairs and alterations on guns he already owned, but in early 1932 he took delivery of a pair of boxlock guns 13545/6. There is no entry in the register for these guns, but we know a bit more about them than might otherwise be the case because they came up for sale at auction at Holt's in March 2001. They have the high ribs parallel to the bore so favoured by his sons, and although the actions are filed with typical bold ball and bead fences, the line of the prominent rib continues into the detonating to produce a very unusual and distinctive shape to the top of the action. Amidst standard rose and scroll engraving, Kell has included the Words "Live Pigeon" on the coverplates. They had 10¼" semi-beavertail fore-ends, 28" chopper lump barrels and weighed just less than 6¼lbs. (Long fore-ends, often splinter shaped, were to be a feature on several Wilkes guns in the coming years.) When sold at auction they still had the

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initials FNH in gold inlaid on them. They were made up, both barrels and actions, by Bloomer. Frederick Horne paid £105 for the pair.

One of Frederick Horne's pair of high ribbed pigeon guns 13545/6.

An event occurred a year after the guns were purchased that is perhaps the main reason for their significance. Frederick Horne called the Wilkes shop to complain about the guns which he seems to have been using quite heavily for clay pigeon shooting. The trigger pulls were inconsistent and unreliable and he wanted Jack to go to Newman Street so he could demonstrate in person and give the guns back. Jack walked the half mile or so to Horne Bros' head office and was shown in to see the boss. On picking the guns out of the case Jack noticed that both coverplates were

The semi-beavertail fore-end of 13546

standing proud. He asked whether there was a turn screw available. There was not, so Frederick dispatched someone back to Beak Street to pick one up for Jack. When this arrived back, Jack removed the coverplates and found that all the sear spring retaining screws had been slackened off. It is impossible for this to happen in normal use as the screws are made a tight fit under the coverplate specifically to stop this. In this condition, not only would the trigger pulls have been unpredictable, the guns would have been very prone to accidental discharge either on closing or once loaded. The Horne's chauffeur was known to be disposed to fiddling with guns if given the opportunity and Jack was as certain as he needed to be that the guns had been given to him to fix. But it didn't matter who had done it, the point was the Hornes had been tinkering and in doing so had made guns that bore Jack's name seriously unsafe and thereby had threatened the reputation of his business.

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The scene was set for a row, and one duly ensued. Jack told Mr Horne that if this ever happened again he would strike the Wilkes name from the guns and never welcome him in his shop again. The conversation was held at sufficient pitch for those in Mr Horne's outer office to hear because when Jack emerged carrying the guns in their case, he did so to a discreet round of applause. Once back at the shop Jack decided to do a proper job and fitted new sears, before regulating the pulls to where Frederick wanted them. He charged £3/5/0 for this work, although George Mealey had fitted and regulated the sears for just 16 shillings. It was a while before Frederick came back to the shop, but in the midst of the game shooting season in 1933, an arm appeared around the door at 79 Beak Street bearing a brace of pheasants, followed by Frederick asking if these would be a sufficient peace offering, which they were. Frederick continued to patronise the firm quite considerably for the remainder of the decade, mainly by getting Wilkes to supply the consumables for his considerable clay pigeon shooting interests.

The story does much to illustrate Jack's strength of character – the Hornes were significant contributors to Wilkes' turnover and profit, but Jack was prepared to risk that to ensure the relationship provided him with the respect that he believed his trade deserved. This is a good point to leave the Hornes although they continued to patronise the firm for a further 50 years. In the rest of the decade they would buy a few more guns, the fleeting popularity of the 2" cartridge offered a wave they had to ride, and George in particular continued to bring in a lot of work.

11000 Series Guns

In August 1930 Wilkes were introduced by George Horne to a Major C.J.P. Ball who purchased a pair of sidelock guns, for £150, Horne receiving from Wilkes £5 commission on the sale. The guns were not an exact pair in that although they both had identical weights and measurements and were numbered "1" and "2", one was game bored and the other had full choke in both barrels, a gold star on the rib of the choked gun reminding the shooter which was which.

The Wilkes numbering system had become decidedly patchy since the move to Beak Street, blocks of numbers in the 10xxx series being used, and then gaps being left unfilled before another block starts, the 10xxx series abruptly ending at 10556. A clue to the reason why may be found in the way Major Ball's guns were made. In 1930 Wilkes was beginning to call on the services of Roland Bloomer, who may by then have had time on his hands because of short working at W&S in Birmingham.

Whilst Wilkes paid for all the component parts, the two guns were made almost entirely by Bloomer and Crathorn. Walter filed the barrels from pairs of BSA chopper lump tubes, Roly made the actions and jointed in the barrels, supplied the locks, furniture, tail pipes, gold ovals, and did all of the stocking screwing and finishing. The guns only came to London for proof and later for engraving by Kell, which he did for £7/0/0 for the pair. It is tempting to think that Bloomer was contemplating setting up on his own making up guns for the trade and numbered these, his first two examples 1001 and 1002. When Wilkes had a customer for them there was an easy way to fit them into the numbering system by adding an extra 1 to the numbers.

The guns are marked in the number register as "Second Quality". This is evidenced by the sourcing of some of the materials and the cost of engraving which was about £1 per gun less than Kell would charge for a best pattern. The price at which they sold was about £50 cheaper than Wilkes would have charged for a pair of best guns, and they were sold in a relatively inexpensive double leather case from Clark which cost Maj. Ball £7/0/0 extra.

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The true quality of these guns can perhaps be best assessed by their reappearance in the shop in 1989, when at almost 60 years of age they were sold to another customer for £15,500, a very good price for those days. There was to be just one more Wilkes gun with an 11000 number, George Horne's 8 bore which was sold three months later. In 1930 other events were taking place which would require yet another leap in the numbering system.

Harrison & Hussey

Whilst looking through the supplier ledger the following transaction jumps off the page as unusual: -

Bought from C.B.Vaughan on 22nd May 1930 the following

1	*12 bore A&D gun in soft state No 2223*
1	*20 bore A&D gun in soft state No 2257*
1	*12 bore sidelock action and barrels No 2254*
1	*12 bore sidelock action and barrels No 2231*
1	*12 bore A&D action and barrels No 2214*
1	*20 bore A&D action and barrels No 2258*
1	*12 bore German U&O action and barrels No 2208*
3	*Pairs 12 bore barrels Nos 2091, 2127, 2137*
2	*Pairs 16 bore Whitworth tubes Nos 52128/9, 52137/8*
58	*Stocks*
19	*Fore ends*
6	*Sets of furniture*
2	*Sets sidelock machinings*
Sundry	*small parts*

£92/10/0

This is part of Harrison & Hussey's stock in trade, the numbers coming from their numbering system. According to Masters[23], the firm began liquidating its stock in late 1929, and Vaughan must have been amongst those picking up the pieces. Jack seems to have paid a reasonable price. Had he ordered this list of components from his suppliers at the time he would have paid close to £200 for them, but these were not exactly to his requirements, so it was a job lot at half price. The first problem seems to have been that some of the made or partly made guns were already numbered, a problem which was addressed by once again adding a "1" to the front of the existing number and fitting these in with Wilkes's numbering system by jumping that into the 12xxx range.

The boxlock guns and actions were turned out as fairly modest specimens, although one of them was engraved by Sumner, all selling for between £30 and £35. The sidelocks provide a more interesting story. 2231 was a Rogers action sidelock, the barrel and action of which was taken in hand by Bayliss and stocked and finished by him for less than £7, turning it into a gun, 12231, that was sold to a retail customer for £75. The other sidelock action 2254 was a Baker patent self-opener, the same action used at that time in the Lancaster 12/20. Jack had a customer for this, but the customer wanted an unmatched pair, one with game barrels and one with pigeon barrels. So Jack set about making another similar gun to produce 12254/55, the only Baker patent guns Wilkes were ever to make.

Roly Bloomer stocked and finished 12254, which was the lighter gun, using a Wilkes supplied blank, Walter Crathorn finished the barrels and Kell did the engraving, in all for about £14. The other gun needed to be made up from scratch so Wilkes purchased an action and fore end machining from J. Pople of Price St, who machined Baker actions for the trade. I never heard

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Tom or John refer to the Baker action by that name; it was always called by them a Pople action. The machinings cost £3/7/0, the furniture £1/6/0 and the Baker patent locks from Chilton £6. Walter Crathorn made up a pair of Vickers chopper lump tubes with flat rib for £3/10/0; subsequently finish boring and matting the rib for another £1, and Roly Bloomer took all the parts including a set of best furniture and a stock blank and made them into a gun for a total of £22/10/0. Again, Kell engraved it, and the two guns together in a double case with cover, supplied by Lewey for £7/10/0, were sold to their retail customer in August 1931 for £193/10/0 complete in their case. Somewhat unsurprisingly, given that their specifications were so different, these two guns did not stay together, the pigeon gun coming up fully refurbished in the Tulchan Lodge sale in March 1995 and again at Gavin Gardiner's Gleneagles sale in August 2013.

W.W. Dowding

William W. Dowding was to be one of Wilkes' most important customers during the 1930s. The interest in him stems not just from the firearms that were made for him but also from the range of services that an enthusiastic shot, as Dowding certainly was, expected their gunmaker to provide. Dowding was related to Hugh Dowding (later Lord Dowding), the Royal Air Force officer who was to rise to prominence as the Head of Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. He was an enthusiastic shot and a keen sport fisherman with both the time and resources to devote to both these pastimes. In 1937 on a fishing expedition to New Zealand he landed with rod and line a 922lb Thresher shark; a world record that still stands.

In the late 1920s, Dowding, still in his twenties, was a customer of Churchill. Masters[22] describes him as "a great friend of Robert Churchill and an excellent customer" in a preamble to describing Dowding's purchase in late 1930 of gun no 4419, one of the first Premiere grade guns to be made with Churchill's patent compound trigger. This was a mechanism that allowed either of the triggers to function as a single trigger, the choice determining the firing sequence, the patent application for which was submitted in March of the year. Churchill made 4419 with two pairs of interchangeable barrels in lengths of 25" and 27". Immediately after describing this purchase by Mr Dowding, Masters goes on to describe a pair of Premieres fitted with the same trigger sold to another Churchill customer, Captain E.J. W. Noakes, also in 1930. Curiously both Dowding and Noakes were to become customers of Wilkes shortly thereafter.

Dowding's first purchase from Wilkes was an inconspicuous one, a 20 bore Remington "Sportsman" 3 shot auto loading gun, no S2658, ordered specially from Remington Arms Co Ltd for £11/6/0 and sold to Dowding on 21st May 1931 for £17/10/0, but to this were added the fitting of a recoil pad, the re-finishing of the stock, a case with cleaning accessories and with Dowding's initials stamped on the lid, 100 cartridges, and a trip to the Regent Shooting Grounds to test with 150 clay birds, making the total bill £24/17/6. This gun was bought back in when Dowding no longer wanted it in July 1934 for £12/10/0.

The next invoice was for three annual subscriptions to the magazines, "Field and Stream" (£1/0/0), "Sports and Field" (12/6) and Outdoor Life (£1/12/6). Dowding was sold these at a 10% discount, although quite why his gunmaker would be a necessary intermediary in such a transaction is not clear. Days later on 19th February 1932 he was invoiced for cleaning three Churchill guns, a pair and a single gun, the latter, numbered 4051, also having the action re-varnished as it was quite new. On the same invoice he purchased a second-hand .22 rifle and had it converted to .22 Hornet, together with significant refurbishment costing in total £12/5/0. In April and July of 1932 Mr Dowding made two payments totalling £150 on account with Wilkes in respect of guns that would be delivered the following year.

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In mid-1932 Dowding took into Wilkes his Churchill gun with the patent triggers, after little more than a season's use, for what amounted to a complete re-build. They made a new pair of 27" barrels for it, converted it to ordinary double trigger, restocked it and fitted a new rib to the original 25" barrels. George Mealey, although mainly an actioner also filed barrels, and he made up and fitted the new barrels from a pair of Webley chopper lump tubes, and converted the triggers. Harper fitted the new rib and restocked the gun using wood supplied by Wilkes. Between them these two invoiced Wilkes about £13 for this work, on top of which would have come proving, blacking and regulating. The bill to Dowding in March 1933 was £35/0/0.

Why or exactly when Dowding moved his custom to Wilkes from Churchill is not known. John recalled his father telling him that Dowding asked Wilkes to take some of his Churchill guns in as part exchange for the new guns he had on order, and that Jack declined because he would not offer these guns for sale to one of his customers, suggesting instead that Dowding sell them to Vaughan. Relations between the firms of Wilkes and Churchill were never close, and this incident, and a similar one with Captain Noakes, did nothing to improve them. Dowding's relationship with Churchill's was not however severed by his long period of patronage at Wilkes. In the 1950's his firearms certificate showed his address as c/o Churchill Gunmakers Ltd at their Orange Street address.

E.J.Churchill

Both Wilkes and Churchill had very similar sourcing arrangements for the majority of their guns, but Wilkes always believed they could get better work out of Birmingham, a view in which they seem to have been supported by others in the trade. They also undercut Churchill's prices very substantially, Wilkes best, and largely London made boxlock retailing in the 1930s at the same price, £45, as Churchill's second quality A&D gun, and at under half the price of Churchill's rather expensive Hercules best boxlock. Just before the war these were sold for 90 guineas (£94/10/0) giving their vendor a much larger margin than Wilkes. Mr Harper pointed out to Hinchley[21] that these guns were sold at the time to Churchill fully proved, engraved and finished and ready to go to the customer for £23/5/0.

Churchill certainly had strengths, particularly those derived from their proprietor's credentials as an outstanding competition shot and gun fitter. He also had very particular views on stock shapes and these were compounded by the firm's approach of block stocking guns for quick delivery, so that the line of the hand of the stock is set before any length and bend measurements are known. This could result in some very unusually shaped guns. The younger John Wilkes in later years was disposed to describing some Churchill guns as "looking like bricks". Despite this there were occasional contacts between the two firms, but nowhere near on the scale of other makers. They also shared the services of many of the same outworkers.

On 31st August 1932 Dowding took delivery of a pair of second-hand Boss guns 6525/26 which their makers had for sale. The sale price of £173/5/0 passed through Wilkes's books and included the conversion of the guns to double trigger, fitting of the guns at the grounds and alteration to the customer's measurements, all done by Boss. Wilkes took a 12½% commission from Boss on the sale, and Dowding paid for them on delivery. This was the last occasion on which W.W. Dowding was to pay the exact amount of an invoice on delivery. Thereafter he would periodically pay amounts of money into his account with Wilkes, and these would be accumulated, as would any amounts owing and a final account submitted at year end. Wilkes even cashed the occasional cheque for Dowding, but never for more than a few pounds.

The first guns made by Wilkes for Dowding were three consecutively numbered guns, all of different specification that were delivered to him in the second half of 1932, although they were

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not invoiced until 31st March of the following year. Strangely they are completely unrecorded in the register, the only details of them coming from the ledgers. The first 13560 was a 20 bore A&D ejector. It was made up by Roly Bloomer using a pair of 26" Webley & Scott chopper lump tubes, costing £3/15/0, and a stock blank supplied by Wilkes. Bloomer charged £17/5/0 for making and stocking the gun, and Kell engraved it for £2/15/0, a little more than he usually charged so probably it had a little more elaborate engraving than normal. It was put in an expensive Lewey leather case with cover and both case and cover stamped with initials supplied for £5/4/6. Dowding paid £45 for the gun, Wilkes standard price for a best boxlock at the time and a further £12 for the Lewey case and an additional canvas case. After three season's use Wilkes bought this gun in for £30 in its case in August 1935.

The other two guns in the sequence were matching sidelocks, the first 13561 was set up as a pigeon gun with two pairs of barrels and the other 13562 as a trapshooting gun. Dowding was a successful competition pigeon shot; these two guns would have been made for use in circumstances where malfunction or inconsistency would be intolerable. Vickers supplied three sets of pigeon weight tubes at £3/10/0 a pair. Whilst there is no definitive record of who filed the barrels, the Holland & Holland trained barrel filer Charles Field, who was doing regular piecework for Wilkes at the time, submitted two invoices totalling £18 in September 1931, which were very probably for the making up these three pairs of barrels. Both guns were built on 2⅛" bodied pigeon action machinings supplied by William Miles of Price Street for £3/3/6 a set, this price including fitted spindle, bolt and lever. Bloomer once again made up the components into barrelled actions for £17/15/0 and £14/0/0 respectively and then subsequently stocked and completed the guns for £11/8/0 per gun. Kell did the engraving for £4/10/0 per gun, his standard charge for a sidelock but there was then an extra £1/0/6 per gun for gold crests and chasing and ornamenting the barrels. Separate cases were again supplied by Lewey, one of which included space for the extra barrels. The bills to Dowding were £168/6/0 for the pigeon gun with extra barrels in case and £133/16/0 for the trap gun. These were high prices relative to what Wilkes usually charged for what were undoubtedly very fine, albeit somewhat unusual, guns. In 1986 these guns were on offer for sale by a dealer in the United States, by then in an oak and leather double case. His advertisement describes them as being in unused condition; the stocks "as beautiful as any we have ever seen". The asking price was $35,000 for the two guns in their case.

At about the same time he was buying these two guns, Mr Dowding also bought an A&D ejector 12224 that had been made up from one of the barrelled actions bought from Harrison & Hussey. It was stocked by Thomas Shelley, Rigby's stocker at the time, who was doing a steady stream of small woodwork jobs for Wilkes. It was engraved by Jacobson and sold in a Lewey case which cost £3/15/0 extra. This was to be, at £38/15/0 in the case, the cheapest gun that Dowding bought from Wilkes.

Towards the end of 1933, Wilkes started work on a pair of guns for Dowding that were to be the finest that were produced during the period that Jack Wilkes ran the firm. Some half century later, John and Tom still regarded these guns as the best testament to their father's skill. It seems that Dowding challenged Wilkes to produce a pair of guns that were on a par with the best that London could offer. Jack's response was this pair of 6½lb 12 bores with 28" barrels, numbers 13802/03.

To file the barrels, Jack went to George Lane, who was an outworker barrel filer who did most of his work for Woodward and Grant & Lang, but in the slack period of the depression Lane had time to spare, and had taken over from Wheeler as Wilkes payroll barrel filer. There is an unusually large payment to Lane in December 1933 of £17/7/0 which could well have included the filing of the barrels for this pair of guns. The action machinings with steel fore-ends came

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from Miles again. The locks were from Chilton at £6/0/0 a pair, the order for which specified a slight rebound. They also provided the ejector and lever springs. George Mealey who was also on payroll at this time actioned the guns, with disc set strikers with Purdey style stop pins for the discs, and beaded guards. The pair of stock blanks came from the dealer Montrieux and cost £12. These must have been quite exceptional; they were about twice the price of a best quality pair of stocks at a time when good wood was nowhere near as scarce as it is today. For stocking, Jack went to another of Woodward's outworkers, Dickie Bolter, who stocked screwed, made off and chequered the guns for £12/10/0 for the pair. The guns were stripped and regulated by Willie Lane, George Lane's younger brother and an outworker sporting gun finisher. He would shortly join Grant & Lang where he worked through to retirement in 1950. Stripping and finishing this pair of guns was the one and only occasion on which Jack called on his services. The pair was then sent to Kell who put special scroll and flowers pattern on them for £5/10/6 per gun. The customer's initials were let into the stocks in two coloured gold monograms. H. Pitt in Birmingham polished and hardened the work, case hardened the action and blued the steel work, and then everything went back to Lane for final finishing. Lewey made a velvet-lined pigskin case for the pair with gilded furniture and a pigskin bound canvas cover, and Hawksley provided the case accessories. The final bill for the pair was almost exactly £240 with all the extras.

Made at around the same time as the highest quality pair were two other guns for Mr Dowding, a sidelock double .410 for him, and a sidelock 16 bore for Mrs Dowding. Both are described in the register as second quality. The .410, which was number 13652, marked a change in approach to making up guns. Bloomer sold Wilkes a set of .410 beaded furniture and a pair of Chilton .410 size locks at the bargain price of £3/8/6. These were then sent to Webley & Scott along with a stock blank with instructions to make them into a second quality sidelock with 26" chopper lump barrels with 3" chambers. This was done for £25/17/6. The gun which was London proved was sent back to Wilkes in the white. It was engraved by Jacobson for £4/5/0, put in a Bryant leather case with cover and invoiced to Dowding in August 1935 for £88/0/0 inclusive. It was probably delivered to him many months before the invoice date in late 1934. Bloomer's involvement with actioning guns for Wilkes was running down in 1934 although he was to fit a couple of guns with Webley single triggers after this

Mrs Dowding's gun 13793 was made up in shop by Mealey using a pair of chopper lump barrels made up by Webley. It was stocked by Bolter and engraved by Jacobson and sold in a Lewey lightweight case for £70 in August 1935. It was unremarkable in many respects save for the fact that with the exception of the supply of the barrels and the hardening it was made entirely in London. In 1936 Dowding took delivery of a pair of boxlocks. They were 12 bores numbered 13952/53, made with Webley chopper lump barrels, actioned in the shop by Mealey, stocked by Dickie Bolter and engraved by Kell for £5/7/0 for the pair. They were sold complete with a Lewey case for £80/0/0, which was below the normal retail price for guns of this quality, but he was then charged extra for a case cover and for gold initials inlaid into the stock.

In the four years to the middle of 1936, Wilkes had made for W.W. Dowding a total of ten guns, of which six were sidelocks. He had sold back to Wilkes one of the boxlocks so in 1936 Dowding owned six sidelocks and three boxlocks by Wilkes. According to the number register, that was the extent of Dowding's gun purchases from Wilkes, but in June 2007 a gun came up for sale at Holt's that attracted attention. It was in a good canvas and leather trimmed case stamped on the outside W.W.D and bearing a Wilkes trade label. The gun itself looked exactly like a best London gun, with Purdey style engraving, un-rubbed English case hardening, and had a beautifully figured and coloured stock finished and chequered to London Line. It had two pairs of barrels. The gun bore no name but had been catalogued correctly as Belgian and it was marked on the rib

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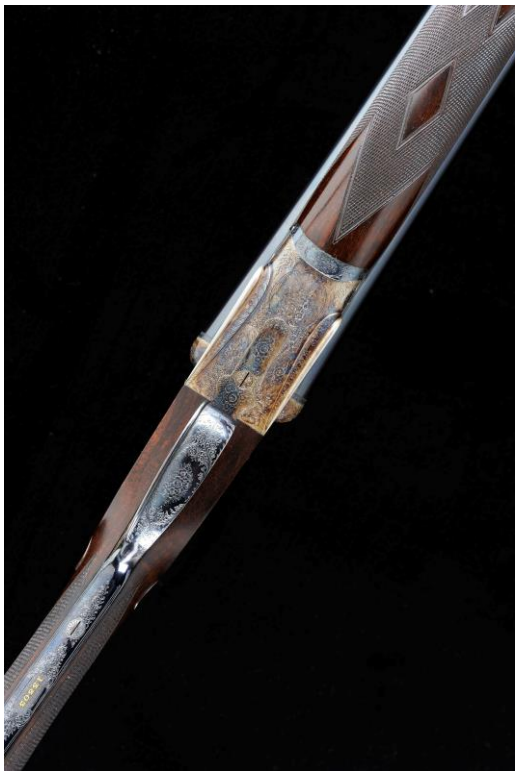
Mr Dowding's best pair of 12 bore game guns, 13802 and 13803, were regarded as Jack Wilkes's masterpiece by his sons. These photos show this pair as they were when they came up for sale in little used condition at Gleneagles in August 2014 with Gavin Gardiner, who kindly provided these images.



There are too many little details on these guns and their unique case to draw attention to them all, but these pictures capture the essence of these best guns of the 1930s. By the standards of today the embellishment may look understated, but the quality of the underlying work is quite exceptional.

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The Gervais gun 28932 finished by Wilkes for W.Dowding as it appeared in Holt's saleroom in 2007.

"Examined and finished by John Wilkes". A search of the ledgers revealed that Gun No 28932 was brought in to Wilkes by Dowding on 9th March 1933. The order book reads: -

> *"Belgian SL ejector with extra pair of barrels, number on barrels 28932, by Jules Gervais, Anvers (Antwerp), in made off and stocked state. Complete from this state. Purdey pattern of engraving. Present boring of barrels not to be altered. Shoot to test and regulate."*

Subsequently there are invoices from Shelley for finishing and chequering the stock and fore-end, from M. Jacobson for engraving, from Flavell for polishing and hardening and from Crathorn for finish boring and polishing the barrels. It seems likely that Dowding took delivery in July/August 1933 but he was not invoiced until the next annual invoice the following March, when he was charged £22/10/0 for finishing the gun. Details of the invoice which specifies exactly what Wilkes did to it are in Appendix 5. So Mr Dowding got a really handsome gun for relatively little money. The gun came back fairly regularly in the years to come for maintenance and was apparently given quite some use alongside his more expensive guns.

The striking aspect of the business between Wilkes and Dowding was not just the number of guns that he had made in a short space of time; it was also the range of other services that he called on Wilkes to provide. We have already noted the magazine subscriptions, but there were several other unusual jobs. To illustrate this Appendix 5 shows a selection of Mr Dowding's annual invoices as transcribed in the invoice ledger. This is not a complete collection but it does show the multitude of his transactions with Wilkes, and all but the most trivial of these were charged. W.W. Dowding continued as a customer of Wilkes during and after the Second World War, his last invoice being in 1977, although never again did his business with the firm reach the intensity of the early 1930s. After the War, he had risen to the rank of Major, a title that was always attached to his name when John and Tom in later years recounted stories of the making of his guns.

Captain Wickham Noakes

Alongside Mr Dowding, Masters[22] records Captain E.J.W.Noakes as an early customer of the Churchill patent trigger, taking delivery of a pair of guns so fitted in April 1930. Eric Wickham

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Noakes was an heir to a prosperous Victorian beer brewing business. He was born in 1897 and was old enough to fight in the First War, rising to the rank of Captain by which title he is referred to in Wilkes' ledgers. By the 1930s he must have been an enthusiastic shot. In the 1930s and mainly between 1931 and 1937 he was to place close to £1000 of business with John Wilkes.

His first gun from Wilkes, 12287, was a Bloomer actioned and finished boxlock non-ejector pigeon gun weighing 7lb 9oz, with Crathorn filed chopper lump barrels with raised matted rib, engraved by Kell and sold for £35 in 1931, with an extra £5/10/0 for the case. The gun was fitted with a gold oval and the Noakes family crest. In early 1933 it was back to have a new longer fore-end fitted for £7/10/0 and the following year it was back again for conversion to ejector and to have the safety converted to automatic for £10/15/0. In mid-1932, Captain Noakes took delivery of a pair of best 16 bore sidelocks, 13567/68, with Vickers chopper lump barrels filed by Field and actioned and stocked by Bloomer and engraved by Jacobson. These were made with the 10¾" long fore-ends which Capt. Noakes seemed to prefer. Jack Wilkes must have encountered a problem regulating the No1 gun as before they were sold, George Mealey had to make a new ejector kicker for it. They were sold in a Lewey case for £200 for the pair. The same year Captain Noakes bought a boxlock ejector .410 for his son for £22/10/0 in case, which had been supplied finished by Harper, the trade price being £13 for the gun alone.

At the end of 1933 Noakes took delivery of another pair of 16 bore sidelock guns, 13606/07. These had 28" chopper lump barrels made up by Webley & Scott with Churchill pattern ribs. They were actioned by Bloomer and fitted with Chilton locks, disc set strikers and again had long steel fore-ends. The stock blanks were supplied by Webley for £6/0/0 for the pair. The guns were engraved by Jacobson and were marked with the numbers 2 and 3, although quite why this was is not clear. Again, the price was £200 for the pair although this time the invoice makes no mention of a case.

In October 1934 Noakes decided to dispense with the pair of Churchill Premieres with the compound triggers of which he had taken delivery a little over four years earlier. Why this was we can only surmise; it may have been that the triggers were giving problems. Jack bought them in at the low price of £100 for the pair, less than half their original purchase price of around £250 and then sold them to Vaughan the same day he bought them for £105. It may have been the experience with this transaction that led him to recommend Mr Dowding, when he approached him to buy in his Churchill guns, to take them directly to Vaughan.

There is an interesting comparison between Noakes and Dowding in relation to their appetite for cartridges. The latter's invoices (see Appendix 5) seldom have shotgun ammunition ordered in more than one or two hundred rounds at a time, a single transaction of 500 rounds being quite unusual. Captain Noakes on the other hand bought ammunition by the thousand, and had Wilkes supply a special 16 bore load for him. For instance, the invoice for the pair of guns fitted with Churchill ribs also had 3750 rounds of ammunition on the same bill at £9/15/0 per 1000.

Captain Noakes' final big purchase was the only double rifle to be sold by Wilkes in the 1930s. 13960 was a .350 No2 boxlock ejector rifle supplied in the white by Webley & Scott for £47/10/0. It was fitted as usual for Capt. Noakes with a 10¾" long lever fore-end. It was engraved by Kell with a stag head on the coverplate, put in a Lewey case and sold finished for £85/0/0 at the end of 1936. Captain Noakes continued to purchase ammunition and the like from Wilkes until the early 1940s. He died in 1944 after which both his wife and son were to continue as customers for a few years. In the 1950s some of the guns that had been made for him came back through the shop for resale.

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Other Retail Customers

In the period covered by this chapter, John Wilkes' retail business totalled about £20,000. The three major customers already covered, the Horne family and Messrs Dowding and Noakes, accounted between them for about a quarter of this total. There were many other retail customers making up the remaining £15,000. In the five financial years ended in 1928 through to 1932 Wilkes had accounts open at some point during that period with about 210 retail customers. In the eight years that followed, the period covered by the next "receivables" ledger, this number was more than doubled at 460. So the footfall through the shop was increasing quite steeply during the 1930s, although the prosperity of the business and its turnover showed no convincing increase to correlate with this trend.

13565/6 were a pair of best boxlocks made in 1932 for a customer in Surrey. They were made with 27" W&S chopper lump barrels, actioned and stocked by Bloomer, engraved by Jacobson and weighed just 5lb 14 oz. The pair was sold for £90. The similarity with later guns made entirely by W&S is striking.

Gun 13958 was typical of several in the register in the thirties. It was a 26½" barrelled boxlock with matted rib that weighed just 6lbs 3 oz. It had a screwed pin action with no extension, rocker safety, Scott spindle and Southgate ejectors. It was sold in August 1936 to a Mr W. Letts, one of two boxlock guns he purchased from Wilkes in the 1930s. It had Webley & Scott filed barrels. At the time, they charged £1/17/6 for a pair of filed up dovetail lump barrels and an extra 2/6 for rough chambering and machining to take extractors, but not including fitting them. The finisher is recorded in the register as JW (Wilkes). With the exception of the engraving, which was scroll and flowers with the "Special Pigeon Model" brand on the coverplate, done by Kell for £2/0/0, there are no other supply transactions in the ledgers that can be definitely ascribed to this gun. It was made up by either Jack or George Mealey in the shop. Around this time, Jack was buying in quite regularly small amounts of component parts, action machinings, sets of furniture, lever work forgings and the like, and these were being made up into completed guns. There is an irony in that these guns, in which Wilkes had the biggest hand in

One of a pair of 12 bore sidelocks 13595/6 made for a regular customer in August 1933. They were made mostly by W&S and sold for £160 for the pair. This photograph, from the catalogue of Sotheby's Gleneagles sale in 1988, where the pair fetched £15,000, shows how much auctioneer's photography has improved in 25 years.

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their manufacture, are the very ones for which we also have the sparsest paper trails. This particular gun came up for sale at Gavin Gardiner's auction in December 2010. It had been lightly used and still conformed to original specifications; looking very elegant alongside some of the other boxlocks in the same sale. It had a scroll cut back to the action and beautifully filed and very prominent ball and bead fences, the latter being a Wilkes speciality style. It was nominally a second quality gun, having dovetail barrels and a well-figured but not exceptional stock, selling new for £35/0/0, ten pounds cheaper than the best boxlock. It sold at auction for £1,700, a very reasonable price given its condition and pedigree.

Gun 13958, a scroll back boxlock gun, actioned in the shop by George Mealey and fitted with W&S barrels, and ornamented with £2 worth of Kell's engraving.

Another Pigeon gun that had fared less well over the years was 13569, a best boxlock non-ejector, with raised flat rib and dolls head extension, sold to a Mr W. Hetherington in 1932 for £38/10/0 including a case. This was made up by Bloomer with chopper lump W&S pigeon weight barrels, supplied for £3/15/0 – twice the price of the dovetail ones. Bloomer made it up for £14/14/0 using a Wilkes supplied stock blank. It was engraved by Jacobson in the same style as the previous gun and the action similarly filed, although the stock had a point finish whereas the gun above had a plain head. This was a full weight pigeon gun tipping the scales at 7lbs 3oz when new. Hetherington sold it back to Wilkes at the end of 1934 for £25, buying in its place a new boxlock game gun 13704 for £35. Wilkes sold 13569 to a new customer, a Mr Sparks, in January 1935 for £20, and bought it back from him in January 1952 for £30, reselling it a third time in the following September for £50. At some point thereafter, 13569 came back into Wilkes' shop for conversion to an ejector, probably in the 1970s. It was back in the shop for sale again in 1995, selling then for £3,500. By the time this gun came up for sale at Sotheby's ten years later in 2005 it still looked in reasonable condition, but the barrels had been hot soda blacked at some point, the short rib having had a hole drilled in it to release pressure, and the sludge that had entered during the process could be heard sliding up and down between the tubes.

Gun 13794 from this period had a similar pedigree. It was a best quality boxlock, actioned by George Mealey using a pair of Webley chopper lump barrels. This gun was stocked by Watson's stocker Ebenezer Hands, who apparently had the time to take on the work as his employer had insufficient to keep him busy. It was engraved by Kell and sold to Mrs Rivington in 1935 for £45/0/0 with an extra £5 for its case. This gun is well illustrated in Volume I of Nigel Brown's

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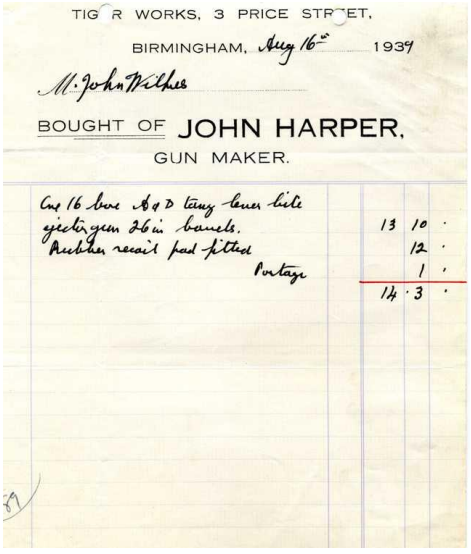
book[7], the picture showing clearly the tear drop on the comb which was Hands' signature make off for his best stocks.

A large corporate customer was an unusual find in the Wilkes ledgers, but Imperial Chemical Industries Ltd, headquartered on Millbank on the north side of the Thames just to the west of the Houses of Parliament placed an order for a 16 bore boxlock gun 13792 that was delivered in April 1935. This was very much a best gun. It had Whitworth tubes, almost certainly one of the two pairs bought from Harrison & Hussey stock, that were filed by George Lane into a pair of 27½" barrels. It was actioned in the shop by Mealey and stocked by Bolter, fitted with a gold oval, and finished by Jack Wilkes. Kell engraved it with a scroll and game, a pheasant on the bow of the guard and two grouse on the coverplate for which he charged £2/10/0. The gun had a best Anson catch on the fore-end and weighed 5lb 13oz. It was sold for just £35/0/0, which seems an unusually low price for such a gun. The gun was dispatched to Messrs Carlisles Ltd at an address in Whitworth Street in Manchester, apparently not in a case. We don't know whether this was a corporate gift, a retirement present or a purchase with a more tangible commercial purpose.

14028 was a 20 bore boxlock with Webley & Scott tubes, that was actioned by Mealey, stocked by Hands, fitted with all the best features, points, rocker safe etc., finished by Wilkes and engraved in fine scroll and flowers by Kell. It weighed 5lbs 7 oz with 26" barrels. It was sold to Mr Kingman Brewster, a regular customer, in July 1937 for £50/0/0 with an extra £5/0/0 for a Lewey case. The price discrepancy with the previous gun is curious.

A second quality 16 bore sidelock 13915 was made for a Swiss customer living in Gstaad in December 1936. This had 27" Webley & Scott barrels, was actioned by Mealey, stocked by Bolter, had a gold oval, was finished by Wilkes and engraved with scroll and flowers by Kell for £4/0/0. It was sold complete in case with accessories for £70/0/0, about two thirds of the price of a best gun.

The above descriptions, both in this section and the earlier ones relating to some larger customers, cover a representative cross section of the guns that were made up and finished in and around the Beak Street workshops in the 1930s. From these descriptions, the earlier proposal that no two guns followed precisely the same path in their manufacture has now been demonstrated. There remain a few other threads to examine before the account of this pivotal period in the firms history can be drawn to a close.


TIGER WORKS, 3 PRICE STREET,
BIRMINGHAM, Aug 16th 1939
M. John Wilkes
BOUGHT OF JOHN HARPER,
GUN MAKER.
One 16 bore A & D Lever Sidelock ejector gun 26in barrels. Auction recoil pad fitted
Portage
13 10 .
12 .
1 .
14 3 .

The invoice for one of the last of the pre-war guns supplied by John Harper.

Webley & Scott

By 1935, Wilkes' use of John Harper as the manufacturer of complete or partially complete guns was nearing an end; they would supply only 5 guns in the period between 1936 and 1940, although their services continued to be drawn on during this time for repairs and alterations. There are no clues in the records as to why the business with Harper declined; it could have been that the firm was losing momentum as its proprietor, the son of the founder, reached old age. The John Harper then running the firm died in April 1937 at the age of 69, the business then being carried on under his son, John Norman Harper. Bayliss remained the largest source of guns, mostly boxlocks

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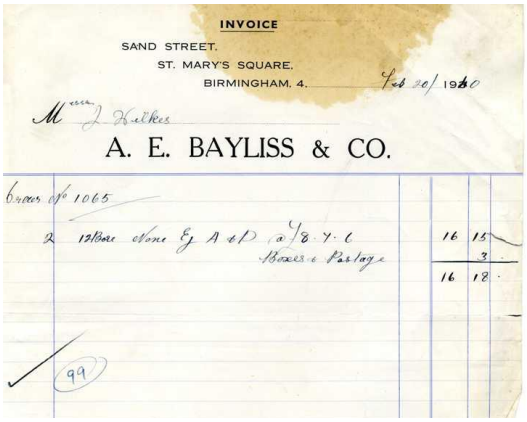
with normal specifications, supplying about 150 of these in the second half of the decade. The balance of Wilkes supply from Birmingham, just over 50 guns in total in the same period, came from Webley & Scott.

Given Wilkes' position as a firm that specialised in sourcing from the Birmingham trade, their modest use the services of one of the dominant players in that city in the previous forty years of business may be seen as rather surprising. Wilkes moved into using Webley as the Depression eased. Two of the craftsmen they drew on most heavily at the start of the decade, Bloomer and Crathorn, both worked for Webley & Scott. It may be no coincidence that the decline of their involvement in making Wilkes guns was matched by an increasing call on Webley's services.

We have already seen examples of Webley supplying both barrel tubes and made to order filed barrels to feed in to Wilkes' gun manufacturing. Webley & Scott's retail catalogues of the period emphasise the investment the firm had made in the manufacture of barrel tubes and their subsequent machining. In later years John and Tom would both speak effusively of the quality and the range of work that came out of Webley's factory, which went far beyond just turning out their proprietary mid-range boxlock and sidelock guns with retailer's names on them. Their best sidelock gun, which cost as much as a best London gun, was equivalent in quality to it in all respects, and their better boxlocks, some of which had Scott spindles rather than the tell-tale proprietary screw grip, were indistinguishable from those made in London. Alongside its manufacturing operations, their factory also took in work, both repairs and the undertaking of particular steps in the building of a gun.


INVOICE
SAND STREET.
ST. MARY'S SQUARE.
BIRMINGHAM. 4.
A. E. BAYLISS & CO.
16 15
3
16 18
99

One of the last invoices from Bayliss for the supply of two low grade non- ejector guns

The first encounter with W&S as finisher, as defined in Wilkes register in this period, is a pair of guns already described, made for Capt. Noakes in late 1933, where Bloomer and W&S between them seem to have made up the guns into a shooting state apart from the supply of the locks, which came from Chilton. A boxlock gun 13699 which was made early the following year had a somewhat simpler pedigree in that it was standard W&S Fig 400 boxlock, Birmingham proved with 2¾" chambers and weighing over 7 lbs. It had a cut away action back and was fitted with a gold oval. Webley's made it up using a stock blank supplied by Wilkes. They charged £15/0/0 for the gun in the white, with an extra £1/10/0 for the action back and the oval. Kell engraved the gun with a duck on the guard for £2/10/0 and it was sold for £45/0/0. The Fig. 400 was the Webley "proprietary gun" and was made in 3 grades that differed in quality of finish in 12 or 16 bore and to several specifications for retail sale, all of them having a third bite.

13725, a best boxlock pigeon gun, made by W&S and finished in London.

W&S were also allowing Wilkes to meet a steady demand for pigeon guns. 13725 was one

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such, a full weight boxlock pigeon gun with high tapering and matted rib that was parallel to the bore, chopper lump barrels, London proved with 2¾" chambers, and fitted with a selective single trigger and half pistol stock. It came in to the shop stocked and in the white from W&S for £26/10/0, and was then finished and polished by Wilkes, and rose and scroll engraved by Kell, with the "Special Pigeon Model" logo on the coverplate and a pigeon on the dolls head. It was sold to Mr Oppenheimer in December 1934 for £45, with the case being supplied at extra cost the following year. This was the price of Wilkes best boxlock and this was indeed such a gun, with a screwed pin action, Scott spindle with third bite and a beavertail fore end fitted with a best tailpipe. The style of the filing is exactly the same as on Wilkes' London made boxlocks.

Somewhat simpler were two transactions in August 1935 where W&S supplied a "16 bore A&D Southgate ejector gun 13799 fully finished for £16/0/0 and a similar one 13800 in 12 bore for the same price, both guns then being sold to the same customer for £35/0/0 each, with an extra £4/15/0 each for two cases. These guns were London proved, engraved with scroll and flowers and had Scott spindles and no extensions.

During the next three years, Wilkes used this particular model on several occasions. By 1937 it was coming into the shop, London proved and in the white, at £18. They varied in detail, some had chopper lump barrels, which were £2 extra, some had point finish stock heads and others had plain, and some had scroll backed actions and disc set strikers. Those bought in the white were then engraved by Kell, usually with rose and scroll for £2/10/0. Some were very light for 2½" chambered 12 bore guns. 14037 was ordered on February 26th 1937, and delivered six months later in the August for £42/10/0, in its Lewey lightweight case. It had 26½" dovetail barrels with a tapering concave rib and ivory bead foresight, and weighed just 5lbs 15oz. It had a point finished stock, scrolled action back and disc strikers and an 8 inch fore-end with shoulders on the wood. Its first owner, Mr J.R.Moritz, was a stockbroker, with an office in the city and a home in Esher in Surrey. He was called up for military service in the war as a Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, and died of wounds received at El Alamein in 1942. His gun appears to have been relatively little used by him and subsequent owners and remains in full accordance with its original measurements, as determined by Moritz's fitting at the shooting grounds a few days after he placed the order. The walking pheasant that Kell engraved on the bow of the guard is as crisp as the day it was cut.

14037, Mr Moritz's gun, made by W&S and finished in London with full Kell engraving, point finished stock and a knuckle on the fore end.

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The Wilkes register usually notes the style of the stock head for boxlock guns. The plain head similar to that on the Webley 700 was usually referred to as a "BW head". This was an abbreviation for back work – a reference to the stock shape of back action hammer guns, where the line of the hand of the stock flowed smoothly through the head of the stock into an action slightly rounded at top and bottom. Other stock head descriptions used were "shoulders" meaning a flat oval backed panel on the side of the stock, "spade" where the side panels came to a point and "point finish" to indicate the side panel tapered to drop points

The next gun in sequence, 14038, weighed the same; it had 27" chopper lump barrels and was sold for £45/0/0. 14040 had a BW head and straight action back and was engraved to the same patterns as 14037. It had 28" dovetail barrels and a nine-inch fore-end, one inch longer than usual, it was a couple of ounces heavier, and was sold for £35/0/0.

These few similar guns were all supplied and finished through the same route and were all sold within a few weeks of one another in the late summer of 1937 to different retail customers. They were all of superb quality, inside and out, with good well grown dark stocks with restrained but complex figuring. Kell's engraving was certainly not an attempt to dress up a cheap gun; these were of a quality entirely deserving the attention of the master engraver. We can only speculate if Wilkes was getting better work out of Webley than his competitors. He probably was. It is hard to see how they could have been getting better guns at the price. These few guns also demonstrate a characteristic we have seen before; there was no obvious structure or consistency in Wilkes' retail pricing. Within reason a figure seems to have been arrived at on a case by case basis.

14040 was very similar to 14037, but with a longer fore-end and a BW stock head.

One of the most unusual entries in the register relates to a pair of 16 bore sidelock guns 13954/55. These were ordered by Vaughan to be an exact match for a William Evans Gun No 13654, which had been made around 1925. As Webley supplied many Evans guns this may not have been quite as daunting a challenge as it sounds but the pattern gun had a very detailed specification that included single trigger, iron over locks, screw grip, beaded guard and disc set strikers. W&S supplied this pair for £69 and Wilkes sold them on to Vaughan for £95.

A simpler supply was a pair of 12 bore sidelock ejectors with London proved chopper lump barrels, 14031/32 that were supplied by W&S in July 1937. They weighed 6lb 6oz, had double beads on the action, disc set strikers and gold ovals. They came into the shop at £76, and were then engraved by Kell for £4/14/6 each. They were sold in July 1937 to Mr Blundell for £200

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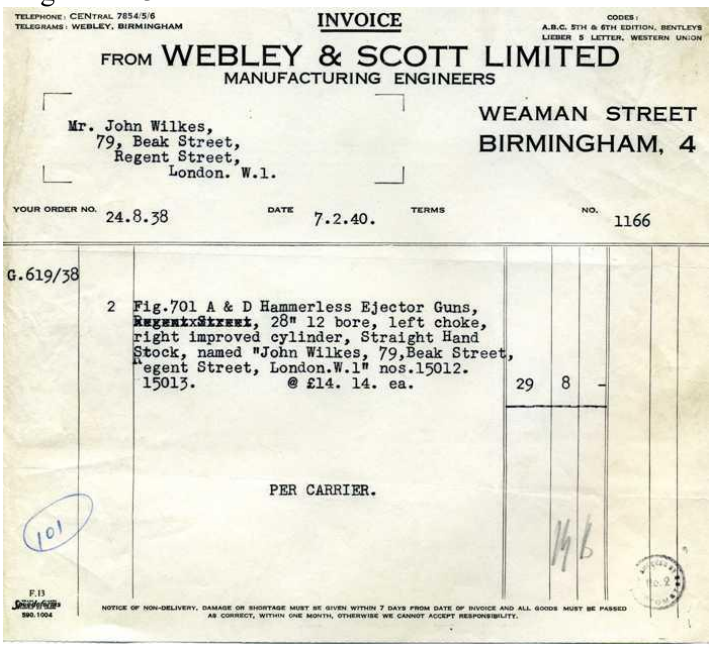
with another £7/10/0 extra for a double leather case. They were bought back from the owner some sixteen years later for £140, to be resold to none other than Major Dowding. A similar pair of best guns, this time boxlocks, follow immediately in the number sequence. 14032/33 had 28" chopper lump barrels, scalloped back actions with disc set strikers, shoulders on the fore-ends and gold ovals. They also were engraved by Kell with a pheasant on the guards. These came in from W&S at £50 for the pair, and were sold to Lord Ebbisham in a Lewey best leather case for £128/10/0.

By the closing years of the decade Wilkes were increasingly reliant on Webley for supplying some of their better guns. When one looks at these guns today, there is little in the appearance or externally visible engineering to reveal their manufacturer. Those that were delivered in the white probably had some time spent on them in London, finish filing the beads and fences and other fine details before they were sent round to Kell's workshop. When Wilkes guns of this period come up for sale, there is very little in their appearance or indeed their underlying quality to differentiate those that were made in London, within walking distance of Beak Street, and those that were made in large part in Webley's factory in Birmingham.

This is not true always of the lower grade guns which were supplied under very similar arrangements to those used for the 700 series after the war; indeed many of these pre-war guns are mechanically very similar to 700s. With these examples the characteristic Webley mechanisms were more frequently encountered, the screw grip, the solid pin action with the lump coming through the front edge of the coverplate and the ejector trips in the lifters. Where Wilkes ordered these it is quite usual to see extras being specified, for pairing, for extra quality wood, for gold ovals and many other features. W&S, although they were working from a catalogue with models and grades defined, were still producing a bespoke product in all but the most basic grades.

In the period between 1934 and the early years of the war Wilkes sourced 53 guns from W&S. Of these, 42 were boxlocks and 11 sidelocks, one of the boxlocks was a rifle, and 40 out of the total were London proved. Kell and Jacobson engraved 23 of them in London.

Some of the last guns ordered before the war were five Figure 701 boxlocks, Birmingham proved and delivered fully engraved and finished for £14/14/0, bearing the Wilkes name and numbered in their sequence. At the time the better quality boxlock that was the base model for those that Kell engraved was coming to Wilkes "in the white" at between £18 and £20 according to specification. The 701s were delivered between 1938 and 1940. Crudgington and Baker have a tabulation[13] in Volume III of the market lifetimes of many W&S models, showing the 700 not being available for retail sale until 1947 and the 701 not until 1951. W&S had a separate trade catalogued that



TELEPHONE: CENTRAL 7854/5/6
TELEGRAMS: WEBLEY, BIRMINGHAM

INVOICE

CODES: A.B.C. 5TH & 6TH EDITION, BENTLEYS LIEBER 5 LETTER, WESTERN UNION

FROM WEBLEY & SCOTT LIMITED
MANUFACTURING ENGINEERS
WEAMAN STREET
BIRMINGHAM, 4

Mr. John Wilkes,
79, Beak Street,
Regent Street,
London. W.1.

YOUR ORDER NO.	DATE	TERMS	NO.
24.8.38	7.2.40.		1166

G.619/38

2 Fig.701 A & D Hammerless Ejector Guns, ~~Regent Street~~, 28" 12 bore, left choke, right improved cylinder, Straight Hand Stock, named "John Wilkes, 79,Beak Street, Regent Street, London.W.1" nos.15012. 15013. @ £14. 14. ea. 29 8 -

PER CARRIER.

101

14/6

NOTICE OF NON-DELIVERY, DAMAGE OR SHORTAGE MUST BE GIVEN WITHIN 7 DAYS FROM DATE OF INVOICE AND ALL GOODS MUST BE PASSED AS CORRECT, WITHIN ONE MONTH, OTHERWISE WE CANNOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY.

A surviving invoice from W&S of February 1940 for two of the 701 guns ordered by Wilkes in August 1938.

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offered a different range of models. It appears that the 700 series was tried out on trade customers before being released as a Webley branded product to the shooting public. Global events meant that this release would be subject to quite some delay. This pre-war date for the production of the Figure 700 series ties in with John's recollection that the reason that Roly Bloomer stopped actioning guns for Wilkes was that he was increasingly occupied getting the 700 into production. It might also account for why Jack Wilkes ordered five of this new model in a very short interval in 1938.

Finally, of the 53 guns supplied by W&S, thirteen of them had two inch chambers.

Two Inch

Light weight 12 bore guns chambered for the 2" paper cartridge enjoyed a brief popularity in the 1930s. These were essentially guns designed to compete with the 20 bore in both weight and load. Examples are found by many of the leading makers, particularly sidelock examples by Holland & Holland and Purdey and boxlocks by Hellis, Dickson, Skimin & Wood, and several others. All of these guns achieved their lightness by being built on actions that were smaller across the centres and in the bar than the normal 2 ½" 12 bore, and with lighter barrels, very often filed to the limit that would pass proof. There have been several articles in recent years extolling the virtue of these guns in cases where weight is an issue and they are now enjoying something of a resurgence in the market. Nearly all of the examples encountered date from the 1930s.

Wilkes were to sell a total of fifteen of these 2" chambered guns in the four years starting in early 1936. Thirteen of these were made by Webley and all but one, which was fitted with a leather covered pad, weighed between 5lbs 4 oz and 5 lbs 9 oz. Some are marked in the register as being proved for a 1 1/8oz load, which is heavier than that in the normal 2" cartridge, and which if used would have given very unpleasant recoil in so light a gun. The first few Wilkes 2" chambered guns supplied 1936 were W&S Fig 600 models (which were mechanically almost identical to the post war 700 series guns) all with 26½" barrels, which came in two grades, the Model de Luxe at £17/10/0, which had shoulders filed on the bar of the action, point finish stock and disc set strikers, and a plain model at £13/0/0. The Model de Luxe was sold to Vaughan at £22/10/0 and retail at £25/0/0. After the first few sales in 1936 the model designation of the Model de Luxe changed to the BL1, prices and specifications

13986 was a 2" chambered W&S model BL1, seen here in Holt's auction catalogue of December 2006. It was supplied for £17/12/0 and sold to a customer in October 1939 for £25.

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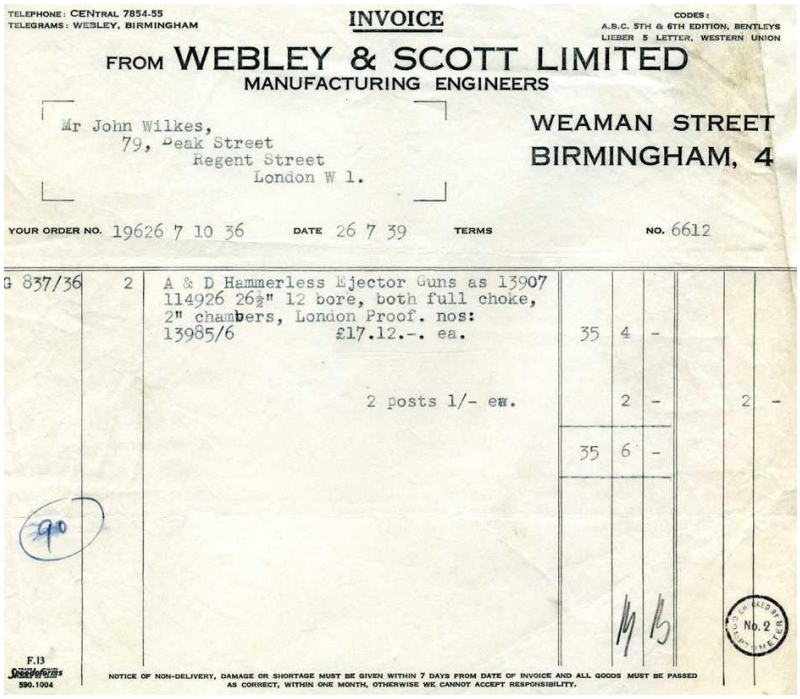
remaining approximately the same. BL1 models were available London proved. The extent to which these guns were lightened during manufacture was illustrated long after the war when a dealer brought one of these guns back into the shop wanting the chambers lowered to 2½". Wilkes refused to do this, so the dealer had the work done elsewhere, the gun then disintegrating during the mandatory re-proof for the heavier charge.

In 1937 Wilkes made up a pair of 2" chambered guns in the shop with 26" chopper lump barrels numbered 14055/56. The engraving by Kell was more costly than usual at £2/19/6 per gun, but there is no description of it. The guns were sold to George Horne for £75/0/0 for the pair. Horne was back in 1938 for a third 2" chambered gun, 14083, this time supplied by Webley in the white with a spare pair of interchangeable barrels and fitted with a single selective trigger. W&S charged £34/5/0 for this gun and by the time it had been engraved, again by Kell, it was sold to Mr Horne for £62/10/0.



TELEPHONE: CENTRAL 7854-55
TELEGRAMS: WESLEY, BIRMINGHAM

INVOICE

CODES: A.B.C. 5TH & 6TH EDITION, BENTLEYS LIEBER 5 LETTER, WESTERN UNION

FROM WEBLEY & SCOTT LIMITED
MANUFACTURING ENGINEERS
WEAMAN STREET
BIRMINGHAM, 4

Mr John Wilkes,
79, Peak Street
Regent Street
London W 1.

YOUR ORDER NO. 19626 7 10 36 DATE 26 7 39 TERMS NO. 6612

G 837/36	2	A & D Hammerless Ejector Guns as 13907 114926 26½" 12 bore, both full choke, 2" chambers, London Proof. nos: 13985/6 £17.12.-. ea.	35	4	-	
		2 posts 1/- ea.		2	-	2 -
			35	6	-	

F.13
590.1004

NOTICE OF NON-DELIVERY, DAMAGE OR SHORTAGE MUST BE GIVEN WITHIN 7 DAYS FROM DATE OF INVOICE AND ALL GOODS MUST BE PASSED AS CORRECT, WITHIN ONE MONTH, OTHERWISE WE CANNOT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY.

The W&S invoice for Wilkes 2" guns 13985/6

Not all customers got on with their Two Inch guns. Mr Stuart-Smith bought a BL1 model in August 1939 for £25/0/0 and sold it back to Wilkes just three months later. He was given a full refund for the price of the gun, but not for its canvas case. It didn't stay on the shelf for long and was resold to another retail customer in June 1940.

The Approach to War

The story in this chapter ends with the firm's 1939/40 financial year at the end of August 1940, almost exactly a year after the outbreak of war. In the opening months of the war, business had carried on much as usual, albeit more slowly. It was only in the spring of 1940 when the "phoney war" came to an end, and the full impact of hostilities began to be felt. The firm of John Wilkes then began to change to fulfil what would become its wartime role. This will be the subject of Chapter 9, but before we get to that we need to look at some of the trends that were occurring in the late 1930s in the run up to the outbreak of hostilities.

The year to August 1937 was a good year for the business; turnover and profit were at an all-time high, indeed if expressed in real terms they would not reach these levels again in the next 20 years. But there were some unhealthy trends appearing. Turnover with Vaughan, which had cleared £2000 in 1936, was beginning a decline, one that would accelerate and make that firm a negligible contributor to Wilkes business within a decade. And other trade customers, who at times had placed significant business with Wilkes, were largely absent in the late 30s. Wilkes

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retail customer community, which had grown in terms of the number of members with active accounts, no longer had the few big spending customers amongst its ranks. They were still there, but by then they all had as many guns as they needed. So the sales came to depend on a number of smaller customers most of whom wanted boxlocks; by this time mostly Webley sourced. The reputation that Wilkes had established for making excellent boxlocks kept these customers coming until after the war had started, but whereas sidelocks that were being retailed for £70 to £110 had a gross margin of £30 to £50, boxlocks selling between £25 and £45 were only grossing between £8 and £18 - so far more needed to be sold to maintain profitability. Perhaps this explains why Jack chose to add items to the bill where he could, for extra engraving, and the like.

Wilkes turnover in each of the three years 1938 to 1940 fell steadily such that by the end of this period it was just over £2200, half what it had been in 1937. Profit also almost halved, in the last three years averaging £650 whereas in the three years previously it had averaged £1100. Both trade and retail turnover fell to bring about these declines. Indeed the performance in the year to August 1940 would have been noticeably worse had it not been for a contribution of £356 of war work business in the early part of the year.

The story so far has focussed on Jack Wilkes and his contemporaries, all master craftsmen born roughly between 1870 and 1890 and all trained in the ethics and procedures of the Victorian trade. This generation were all between 50 and 70 years old at the start of the war, and although few of them expected to retire at 65, they were at or past their prime when war began. Many of them will appear in the story of John Wilkes well after the war, but we can see now looking back, that they had mostly made their best contributions in the decade that was ending. So the trade was going to change as a new generation came through. Jack's older son John started working in the shop at the outbreak of war, he was just 15 when it began, and he and his younger brother Tom would follow their father into the business. But the war and its impact on social structures would mean that few of their generation would join them. After the war the trade would be much different, and some major parts of it would not survive. So the closing years of the 1930s marked in some respects the dying embers of Victorian gunmaking.

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Chapter 8 – Staff, Outworkers and Suppliers 1928 - 1939

The gun trade had gradually evolved a style of working between the centres in Birmingham and London in the century since the coming of the railways starting in 1838. The 1930s represented the last step in that process before the disruption and discontinuity that would be caused by the war. This chapter covers some of the people in the trade that had dealings with Wilkes in this immediately pre-war period. Although some of them would still be active after the war, the trade was never to regain the scale or efficiency of its operation in this period.

The Staff

One group of the ledgers that was routinely kept was a set of cash books that recorded wages paid, the cash drawings of Jack and Tom Wilkes and the many cash disbursements for petty consumables. For the few people that worked in the shop, there are several pages showing the wages paid week by week for each individual, the payment for these permanent employees normally being the same each week. There are also pages for each of the outworker trades of barrel filing, barrel browning, stocking and engraving, and on these are found records of regular payments to the craftsmen that Wilkes employed routinely in each of these specialist skills, grouped by the name of the particular trade. With much of Wilkes' business coming from trade and, to a lesser extent, retail repair work, there were significant numbers of small repairs being handed out to specialist outworkers. These were usually informally invoiced by the craftsmen involved and settled in cash. Some of these invoices from the post war period survive but for the 1930s and earlier all we have is a record of the regular payments. Major jobs, stocking a gun or making up a pair of barrels were sometimes commissioned and invoiced as an itemised transaction, in which case they appear in the more detailed supplier ledgers, but some of these major jobs were also handled through the cash book alongside small repair jobs, thereby being much less traceable.

There were three staff employed in the shop in the 1930s. Two of these, H. Moore and C Gridley joined no later than mid-1932 and stayed until just after the start of the war. The starting point of their employment is not clear as prior to their mention by name in the ledger, cash was being drawn for the wages of un-named recipients, which could have been them. Moore was paid £2/10/0 per week, sometimes £3/0/0, and Gridley £1/10/0. At around this time Purdey's were paying their master men around £4 to £5. The wages for these two rose steadily during the decade such that by the outbreak of war they were being paid £3/12/6 and £2/10/0 respectively. I have not been able to trace either, but it is probable that they were handling the steady stream of repair and refurbishment work coming through the shop. The other permanent employee was the actioner George Mealey who was on the regular payroll from late 1933 through to mid-1936. He was normally paid about £2/10/0 per week, but in some weeks it could be as much as £6/0/0. We have already seen that Mealey was responsible for actioning a number of the London made guns in this period, and earlier when he was paid on a piecework basis. He also sourced a fairly steady supply of component parts, such as action machinings, furniture and locks to the shop for which he was paid separately. After he left the regular payroll in May 1936, by which time he was being paid £3/12/0 per week, he continued to serve for a short while as an outworker – his last job being the actioning of a gun sold in mid-1937.

George Mealey

George Mealey was an actioner who made a significant contribution to the Wilkes guns that were made in London in the 1920s and 1930s. He is recorded as having actioned about 35 of the very best guns that Wilkes made at this time, the majority of their top end production. Details of these are recorded in the main text. When he went to Beak Street as a schoolboy, John remembered Mealey working at the bench in the rear first floor workshop making up best boxlock actions. He

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was on payroll from late 1933 through to mid-1936. Although he made significant contributions to the actioning of guns made in that period, much of this is poorly documented because there are no supporting invoices. Before this his contribution is often more explicitly described in itemised invoices which show how much he charged for particular jobs.

George Mealey was born in Birmingham in 1868, the son of a brush maker. In 1881 he was recorded as an errand boy living with his parents in Borderley, Birmingham, but ten years later he had married Alice and become a Gun Action Filer, living near his parents. Ten years further still and the family had moved south to East Ham in East London, George being employed as an action filer. In 1908 the last of his eight surviving children, William Morris (Bill) Mealey, was born. By 1911, when the family had moved back to Birmingham, George was no longer employed but was working on his own account as a Gun Actioner, the description "filer" now having been dropped. He was also a capable barrel filer. Four years later, barely six months after the outbreak of war, Mealey joined the army in 1915 in Birmingham at the age of 47 to serve in the Ordnance Corps.

I have not been able to trace for whom Mealey worked for much of his career. Brown makes no mention of him working in either London or Birmingham, suggesting that he never felt the need to have entries in trade directories. Masters reports him as an outworker actioner for Grant at some point[23]. It is possible that he was involved in actioning Wilkes guns prior to the earliest unambiguous reference to his doing so in 1929, because the records that survive from this period almost never identify the actioner. He appears to have stopped working for the firm quite abruptly in 1937, by which time he would have been in his late 60s.

Bill Mealey would follow his father into the trade as an actioner, serving his apprenticeship with him in the 1920s and thereafter spending the rest of his working life employed successively by Grant and Lang, Henry Atkin and finally by Atkin, Grant and Lang when the firms merged, finally retiring in 1980. He died in Suffolk in 1990.

George Mealey lived to a great age; he died in Haringey in east London in 1971 at the age of 103.

Mealey was not the only actioner employed by the firm in London. They made limited use of the services of Harry Caden, mostly for smaller jobs, and in Birmingham they drew heavily on the services of Roly Bloomer, and on the firms of Webley & Scott, Harper and Bayliss.

Harry Caden

Henry Caden was the son of John Caden, a "gunsmith" (according to his own description in the 1891 census) born in Birmingham around 1850 who, by the time of Harry's birth around 1877, had moved to south east London. By 1911, Harry, then aged 34 was married and living in West London near Kew Gardens in a good area of smart Victorian terraced houses. Harry described himself as a gunmaker whilst his father persisted with gunsmith, but both described themselves as employed, the father adding the detail that he was employed in a gun factory. None of the published histories of London makers mention either of the two Cadens in employee records, nor did Brown find them in trade directories, so where Harry Caden was employed for his main job is a mystery. It is possible he worked for John Ross, whose factory was close to where he lived. Caden worked for Wilkes infrequently between 1927, possibly earlier, and 1934, whereupon the relationship seems to have ended. He did occasional jobs for Jack, and Jack in turn supplied him with component parts, so the business between them was mainly accounted for by barter and cash.

Whilst Wilkes used several different barrel filers in London, they regularly only used one in Birmingham in the 1930s. This was Walter Crathorn.

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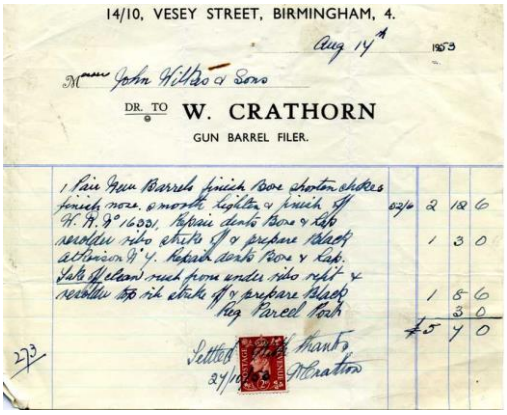
Walter Crathorn

Walter Crathorn was a Birmingham based barrel filer who worked for Wilkes from 1928 and perhaps earlier through to the early 1950s. During that time he made up the barrels of at least 27 London finished guns, as well as performing occasional repair jobs. The last invoice from him was in 1954.

When he was born in 1884, his parents, Charles and Lavinia, spelt the family name as "Crathorne". Charles was an engine fitter living with his wife and six children, of whom Walter was the third, in the centre of Birmingham close to New Street Station and barely a mile from the gunmaking quarter. Walter was the only member of the family to go into the gun trade, by 1901 describing himself as a gun barrel filer. When Charles Leonard, the last of his illustrious family in the trade in Birmingham, was interviewed by Hinchley [20] in his workshop in Lench Street in 1949, a year before his death, he mentions that the barrel filer who worked next door was apprenticed to his father Henry Leonard. This was Crathorn who, in Leonard's opinion, was the best barrel filer then in the trade.

By 1911 Walter had dropped the "e" from his name and was married to Minnie with two daughters and living in Small Heath on the south eastern side of the city. The next record we have of him is from the late 20s when his making of barrels for new Wilkes guns is on record. It seems likely that he was involved with Jack Wilkes during his period in Birmingham in the early 20s. Walter was just two years older than Jack. Brown makes no mention of him, suggesting he never had an entry in trade directories. Wilkes' use of his services peaked in the early 30s to become occasional in the period up to the War and resumed in the late 1940s. They could call on several other barrel filers during this time. Masters records "W. Craythorn" (sic) as a "barrel man" doing out work for Churchill[22] in the post war period, and Grant and Lang records[17] show Crathorn making and repairing barrels for them at around the same time.

By the early 1950s Crathorn was using printed invoices describing himself as a "Gun Barrel Filer" working from 14/10 Vesey Street, Birmingham 4. The letter from Mrs Bloomer to Jack Wilkes in early 1957 referred to Crathorn going back to Webley and Scott which suggested that he had been in their employment previously. It is probable that, like Bloomer, he had been taking in work during quiet times whilst in their employment in the 1930s.


14/10, VESEY STREET, BIRMINGHAM, 4.

Aug 14th 1953

Messrs John Wilkes & Sons

DR. TO W. CRATHORN

GUN BARREL FILER.

1 Pair Gun Barrels finish Bore shorten shokes finish nose, smooth lightly & finish off W. H. 9" 16 gge, Repair dents Bore & Rib remove rib shift & prepare Black altering 9" 4. Repair dents Bore & Rib. Take off Lump, rust from under rib right & remove rib strike off & prepare Black Reg Parcel Post

03/6 2 18 6

1 3 0

1 5 6

3 0

£5 4 0

Settled 24/8 Thanks W Crathorn

A 1953 invoice from Walter Crathorn

There are several letters on file between Wilkes and Crathorn covering the period from mid-1953 through to late 1954 which show that the latter was having some difficulty with his health and was struggling to get work turned around in time. His charges were very reasonable however, ridiculously so by today's standards. Stripping off, cleaning out and relaying ribs on a pair of barrels and then preparing them for black was billed at £1/8/6 in 1953. Barrel filing is quite a physically demanding job and Walter was by then 70 so the return to W&S which must have happened shortly thereafter was perhaps to find a less stressful working environment.

Walter Crathorn died in Shropshire in 1959 at the age of 75.

Three of the leading barrel filers to the London trade undertook barrel repairs for Wilkes during this pre-war period. By far the longest serving was John W. Wheeler, who was taking in regular repair jobs, totalling usually £6 to £8 per month from 1929. At the same time Wilkes were also

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giving a steady stream of barrel work to Charles Field, who also made up a number of pairs of barrels alongside the repairs.

"Harry" Wheeler

Harry Wheeler, who was in reality John W. Wheeler, was a second generation barrel filer who undertook a steady stream of barrel repair work for John Wilkes between 1930 and 1945. He was one of the best craftsmen of his generation. Tom would tell that in his heyday in the 1920s, when there was a fashion for light guns, Harry Wheeler could file a pair of 12 bore barrels with 2½" chambers that would pass proof that weighed just 2lbs 5oz. This allowed a 12 bore sidelock gun to be made at weight of well under 5½ lbs if that is what the customer wanted. Wheeler would have done this without the benefit of wall thickness gauges and other modern measuring devices and machine tools. The separate tubes would have been bored inside, straightened by eye and profile marks would then have been turned on the outside with the tube on a treadle lathe, the outside then being struck down to the marks, the concentricity and therefore the strength of the completed barrels depending entirely on the quality of the workmanship. The trade at this time was mainly concerned with reducing the weight of the gun at the expense, if necessary, of the ability of the barrels to withstand accidental damage.

Harry Wheeler's grandfather was Charles Wheeler, who was born around 1807 and who traded as a gunmaker between 1844 and 1854 from 41 Royal Street in Lambeth, possibly later from other addresses. He had two sons, Louis Henry Wheeler and John William Wheeler, born in 1834 and 1849 respectively both of whom joined him in the trade. By the 1861 census, Louis Henry Wheeler had married and was serving in the Army at Chichester in Sussex and thereafter is not traceable. His brother however went on to become a barrel filer. By 1901 John W Wheeler was shown as a gun Barrel Maker, and an employer, married to Rachel, and with 6 children. Two of his sons, John W Wheeler, born in 1872, and Alfred A Wheeler, both of whom were living at their parent's home, were by then working as barrel filers.

It appears that both John W Wheeler father and son were known in the trade as "Harry". Why this should be remains a mystery – possibly the older brother Henry Wheeler worked for a time in the trade, and his name stuck and was used as nickname for both of the other family members. More likely there was another older relative of that name that was established earlier – but I have been unable to trace them. A high proportion of Grant guns from about 1867 through at least to 1890 have barrels marked with an "HW" stamp which is thought to be that of Harry Wheeler. These are all best barrels, many of damascus with beautifully fitted through lumps. The barrels of the pair of 16 bores made in 1871 for Queen Victoria as a present to the Prince of Wales were so marked. This would indicate that the Wheelers were well established in the trade in the late 1860s at which time the elder JW Wheeler would have been only about 20 years old.

Brown[7] records that that JW Wheeler was established in business at 45 The Grange in Bermondsey, a mile or two south of Tower Bridge, from 1890 to 1931. The older Wheeler died in 1912, leaving the younger John W (Harry) Wheeler to carry on the business. He would then have been 40. In the 1920s-Wheeler appears to have formed a partnership for a while with George Lane, trading as Lane and Wheeler. After leaving Bermondsey, Wheeler moved to the barrel making workshop in Berwick Street in Soho that had been run by Frank Squires. It would seem that several outworkers shared the facilities there, which included electrically powered boring benches.

Most of the stories from the gun trade illustrate a strong degree of camaraderie amongst the outworker craftsmen, united as they were by the unreasonable demands of the proprietors of gunmaking firms and their customers. But there is a story from John Wilkes about Wheeler's time in the Soho workshop that shows this was not always the case. John had gone round to the workshop on an errand as a teenager in the late 1930s. As he approached the door, he could hear a loud and abnormal noise of tortured machinery coming from within. On opening the door, he saw Wheeler, red faced and exhausted, holding on to a pair of barrels in the cradle of the

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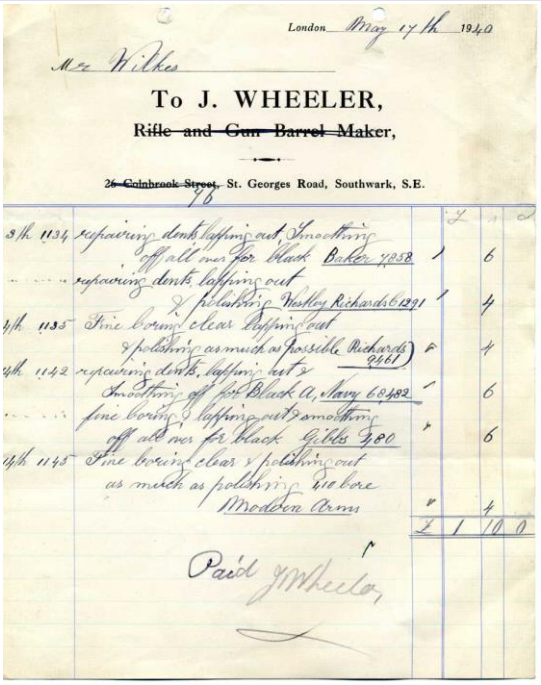
boring bench in which the lap had stuck. The noise was the drive belts slipping, and Harry was unable to reach the OFF switch without letting go of the barrels, which would have been wrecked had he done so. He had clearly been in this predicament for some time. He gestured with his head towards the switch which John pressed and Wheeler, much relieved, was then able start the process of freeing the lap. The odd part of the story is that at several of the benches in the workshop were other barrel filers all working away at their vices pretending they had not noticed what was going on. Despite the noise and commotion, none of them had gone to Wheeler's help.

Shortly after this, and perhaps not surprisingly, Wheeler moved his business south of the river again, first to 26 Colnbrook Street and later (by 1940) to 76 St Georges Road, both near the Elephant and Castle roundabout in Southwark. He was by then in his seventies, and Masters records[23] that he had no electrically powered machinery in his Southwark workshop. He used a treadle powered boring bench. By this time, he was deleting on his printed invoices the words "Rifle and Gun Barrel Maker", presumably to indicate that he was confining himself to repair work. His invoices in the war years are handwritten in a beautiful old-fashioned flowing script, some of them on printed stationery but many are on pages from an exercise book. He would lap and polish a pair of barrels and strike up for blacking for 6 shillings, and re-lay both ribs and prepare for black for 10 shillings.

John W. Wheeler's last invoices to John Wilkes were presented near the end of 1945. He died in 1950 aged 78.



London May 17th 1940

Mr Wilkes

To J. WHEELER,

~~Rifle and Gun Barrel Maker~~,

~~26 Colnbrook Street~~, St. Georges Road, Southwark, S.E.

76

		£	s	d
3/h 1134	repairing dents lapping out smoothing off all over for Black Baker 4338	1	6	
" "	repairing dents lapping out & polishing Wesley Richards 61291	1	4	
4/h 1135	Fine borm clear lapping out & polishing as much as possible Richards 9461		4	
4/h 1142	repairing dents, lapping out smoothing off for Black A, Navy 68482	1	6	
" "	fine boring, lapping out smoothing off all over for Black Gibbs 3280		6	
4/h 1145	Fine boring clear & polishing out as much as polishing 410 bore Modden Arms		4	
		2	1	10 0

Paid J Wheeler

Harry Wheeler invoice from 1940, when he was working from his home address.

Around 1933, the work given to Wheeler was switched to George Lane, who served as Wilkes' principal London based barrel filer until the start of the War, whereupon Wheeler took over again, and was to continue in this capacity until 1945.

George Lane

George Joseph Lane was born in 1878 to George Joseph Lane, a barrel maker and his wife Sophia. Lane the elder was born around 1844 and had his business at 4 Duck Lane in 1879 and later at 46 Rupert Street, both addresses being in the south-east corner of Soho. George was the oldest son of eight children, 4 boys and 4 girls aged in 1891 between 22 and 4 years old, all living in the family home at 44 Ranelagh Road in Willesden in northwest London.

John Wilkes, in his time with Dougall used the elder Lane's services. The younger Lane must have begun working with his father by 1892, because towards the end of that year, when he was about 14, he came to see Mr Wilkes at the Bennett Street shop in a very distressed state. He had just been to his father's workshop and found him dead at his bench. He had shot himself. He must have known Wilkes well enough to go to him first to help with the dreadful discovery,

The cause of Lane's suicide was money worries, doubtless exacerbated by the large family he had to support. After dealing with immediate issues caused by his death, Wilkes offered the boy

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an apprenticeship to train as a stocker. Here he ran into a disagreement with Frank Squires who ran the barrel making business in Soho. Squires felt that because Lane was the son of a barrel maker, he should train in that trade rather than as a stocker. In the event, Squires' view prevailed and George Lane was apprenticed to him as a barrel maker.

By 1911 George Lane aged 33 had been married to Ellen for seven years with three children. His younger brother Willie John Lane, who ten years previously had started out his working life as a railway porter, was living with them in Kensal Rise in north London and by then was a sporting gun finisher. Both of them at this time are employed. It is possible that George still worked for Squires, but there are no records of his brother's employer at the time.

From 1924 through to 1939, Lane worked from addresses in Grosvenor Mews in Mayfair, thereafter moving to Ham Yard of Great Windmill Street in Soho. There are a number of transactions recorded during the early 1930s when he was in Grosvenor Mews in which Wilkes worked on the stocks of guns sent to them by Lane, normally making repairs or adjustments, so presumably at this time he was supplementing his income from barrel filing by buying and selling guns. In the 1930s Lane was regularly filing barrels for Grant & Lang's best guns, charging them £5/10/0 to make up a pair of barrels from supplied Vickers chopper lump tubes[17]. He specialised in regulating the shooting of their guns for which he charged them £1/0/0. He provided this service for both the barrels he had made and those which had been made either in the Grant & Lang factory or by Thomas Kilby in Birmingham. (Kilby charged much less than Lane, £3/11/6 to make up a pair of barrels.) Willie Lane by then was employed full time by Grant & Lang as a stripper and finisher.

Throughout his career George Lane did much of his work for Woodward, although it is doubtful that he was ever directly employed by them. The final workshop that he occupied was in Ham Yard off Great Windmill Street and was shared with Woodward's then dwindling workforce, Lane having one end and Woodward the other. The standards that Woodward required of their barrel filers were very demanding. Charles Woodward would reject any barrels that were fractionally oversize, so a 12 bore barrel had to be able to take a 0.729" plug and nothing larger, and he also insisted on the most precise adherence to pellet counts. Lane used to recount that Charles Woodward would quibble if there was so much as a single pellet discrepancy over the desired pattern within the 30" circle. This meant the barrel filer had to achieve the correct regulation of the choke without enlarging the bore. Other makers allowed the regulation to be done by adjusting both bore and choke.

John recalled George Lane coming into the Beak Street shop during his time in Ham Yard. He described him as a "nice little man". He was on his way to Oxford Street to buy a pair of shoes. As the conversation developed John realised the significance of this expedition. He had just one pair of shoes and he was going to buy another pair because his only shoes had worn out. As John reflected here was a craftsman at the pinnacle of his trade and yet he had little more than the clothes he stood up in.

George Lane died in 1953.

The trade was in turmoil in the late 1920s and early 1930s and the way in which Wilkes placed work with these barrel filers, all of whom were masters of their trades reflects the availability of these skilled men at a time when orders for new guns were falling short of the levels needed to keep the London trade working at full capacity.

A similar situation obtained with stockers. Wilkes regularly employed three outworker stockers in the early 1930s, the most well-known of these being Ebenezer Hands, who was Watson Bros' house stocker at the time. Hands was on a regular weekly wage with Wilkes from November 1934 to July 1935, during which time he stocked a number of new Wilkes guns, but the majority

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of his work seems to have been re-stockers both for Wilkes retail customers and for their trade clients.

Ebenezer Hands

Ebenezer Hands was born in Aston, Birmingham in 1871 to a gun stocker of the same name, who Brown[8] lists as trading on his own account at 27 Loveday St between 1855 and 1869, although he worked for much longer than this without appearing in directories. The Hands name was a relatively common one in the Birmingham gun trade. The younger Ebenezer was the only one of his siblings to follow his father, who was still working as a stocker until at least 1911 when he was 73, and who lived until 1924. The son Ebenezer was living at home and working as a stocker in 1891 but during the next decade he moved to London, where he lived in lodgings in the southeast suburbs whilst pursuing his trade until 1913, when he married.

Masters[23] reports that Watson Bros used Hands senior as an outworker stocker, and that the younger Hands went to work for them when he came to London. Watson Bros, like Wilkes, turned out guns in a range of qualities, the best of which were finished in London, the remainder being made up for them in the Birmingham trade. By the early 1930s, the firm was declining rapidly and was to go into liquidation in 1935 after the death of one of its two proprietors two years previously. It was in this period that Hands did most of his stocking work for Wilkes. After this Hands went on to work for Grant and Lang, who had acquired the name and goodwill of the Watson business in 1935. Like his father before him, Ebenezer was to carry on working to a great age; he was working until his death in his 91st year in 1962. His work was of exceptional quality, his best stocks usually being identifiable by a signature tear drop carved on the angular corner where the thumbhole meets the comb.

When Hands died, Philip Goodship was serving an apprenticeship under him at Atkin, Grant and Lang which had started in 1958. Shortly after completing this, Goodship left their employment and for the next thirty years or so worked for Wilkes amongst others. Philip hated chequering and was only too glad to leave to Tom the chequering tools that he had inherited from Hands. One of these was a laying-on tool that cut four lines at once. In the confident hands of Tom Wilkes this could put the chequer on a stock in a very short time. In less experienced hands it could do untold damage equally quickly.

Working for Wilkes at the same time as Hands was Dickie Bolter, normally employed by Woodward, who was taking work regularly between May 1934 and December 1937. Bolter would return to Wilkes during and after the War.

"Dickie" Bolter

Richard J Bolter was born in 1870 to a Staff Sergeant and his wife in the 4th Foot regiment based in Cheshire. I could find no records for him in the census returns for 1881 or 1891, perhaps because of his father's military service, but by 1901 he had married and was living in Islington in North London, describing himself as a Gunmaker's Woodworker. I don't know with whom Bolter was apprenticed. The first records we have of him working are in the early 1930s at which time he was established as an outworker stocker to the trade. He certainly worked for Woodward but he also took on a number of stocking jobs for Wilkes in the years after the depression, stocking about forty guns between 1934 and 1938, typically charging £2/0/0 to stock a boxlock and £3/10/0 a sidelock, ten shillings more if the fore-end was included. John described him as a very good stocker with the added advantage of also being a very quick worker.

By this time Dickie Bolter was already well into his sixties. John remembered him as being jovial and always enjoying a joke, but when he laughed he went through all the motions associated with laughter, but made no sound in the process. He never sought any kind of professional medical treatment; when toothache became unendurable, he would extract the offending tooth using a penknife. He didn't use the services of opticians either – preferring instead to buy "off the peg"

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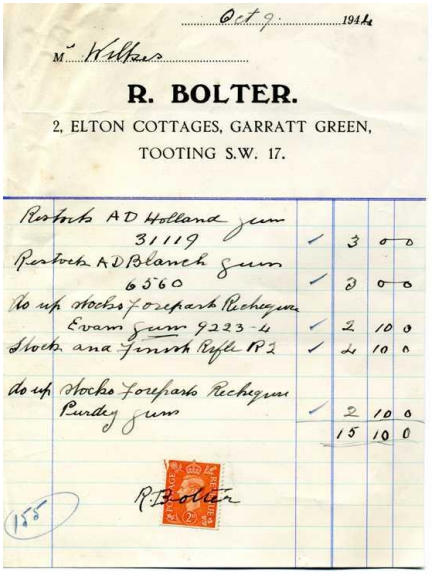
glasses from Woolworths for sixpence to correct the effects of age on his eyesight. As his eyesight deteriorated further he addressed the problem by wearing two or more pairs of these glasses, one in front of the other.

In the 1940s when work from Woodward would have dried up almost completely, Wilkes started to put more stocking jobs out to Dickie. His prices had gone up since the 1930s but only slightly – a best sidelock now costing £4/0/0 to restock. John remembered taking a job down to his home in Tooting in South London, where he worked in a bedroom lit only by a gas lamp. It was a wartime winter and the natural light in the room was poor. John found that Dickie had bought an electric light, but either hadn't bothered or didn't know how to wire it up. By that time he was working with three pairs of glasses on at once and John persuaded him with some difficulty to let him set up the electric light over his bench. Once it was done, Dickie was able to admit that it was better.

Dickie did over £100 of work for Wilkes in the year starting August 1942, and continued working for them at around £80 per year until April 1948 when the last payment is recorded. During this time he was doing a variety of stocking jobs, including repairs and refurbishments. Dickie by then would have been 78 years old. There is no further mention of him until nearly ten years later when a handwritten letter on lined paper dated Tuesday 17th September 1957 is in Wilkes' files. It is addressed from 19 Air Street, W1 and reads: -

"Dear Mr Wilkes,
Just a brief note. I regret to inform you Mr Bolter passed away on Saturday night (on his birthday). He was 88. The funeral takes place on Thursday 10 past 2 from Elton Cottages. At Streatham Cemetery, Garratt Lane, just five minutes walk from his home. Thought it proper to let you know. Sorry I did not let you know sooner but only heard of his death Monday evening.
Yours truly,
Herbert"


Oct 9. 1944
M. Wilkes
R. BOLTER.
2, ELTON COTTAGES, GARRATT GREEN,
TOOTING S.W. 17.
Restocks A D Holland gun 31119 ✓ 3 0 0
Restock A D Blanch gun 6560 ✓ 2 0 0
Re up stocks for pair Richegun Evans gun 9223-4 ✓ 2 10 0
Stock and finish Rifle P2 ✓ 4 10 0
Re up stocks for pair Richegun Purdey gun ✓ 2 10 0
15 10 0
R. Bolter
155

A 1944 invoice from Bolter,

As an outworker Dickie wouldn't have appeared in trade directories, so there is no mention of him in Nigel Brown's book, and yet anyone lucky enough to own a Woodward with an original stock is more than likely carrying around a piece of his workmanship. He worked all his life in the trade for very modest reward, enjoying few of the services and creature comforts that we now regard as inseparable from a civilised society. And yet his contribution, and that of many like him, has gone almost entirely unrecognised.

The last of the outworker stockers was Rigby's stocker, Thomas Shelley, who took on occasional work from 1927 through to May 1934 and again after the war.

Thomas Shelley

Thomas Shelley was born in the Ladywood area of Birmingham in January 1875, the son of an iron plate maker. Amongst his siblings was an elder brother James born in 1871. By the 1891 census, Thomas was described as a gunmaker, although in reality he could only have been an apprentice at 16 years of age. He was still living in Birmingham so presumably served out his apprenticeship there. By 1901 he had married, and was living in Kensal Rise in North London, describing himself as a stocker.

By that time, brother James who had been trained in Birmingham as a sporting gun finisher, had also married and moved to the London area. Donald Dallas in his book on Holland & Holland[15],

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shows J. Shelley as having joined that firm when they opened their first factory at 527 Harrow Road in north London in 1893. He was still there to sign an autograph book for Henry Holland in 1920, so he worked for Holland and Holland in their finishing shop for at least 27 years and probably much longer. Unusually for a London gunmaker James Shelley chose to live outside London in Watford, a town some 20 miles northwest of the centre of the capital. Some of the railway lines that connected London to Birmingham and the Northwest passed through Watford, and Shelley would probably have used the train for the daily commute. The Holland & Holland factory was to the northwest of the centre as well, so his journey would have been quite simple. James died in 1943 in Watford at the age of 73.

Thomas Shelley described himself in the 1911 census as employed as a "gunsmith", by then still living in Kensal Rise with a family of four daughters. By the time he appears in the Wilkes story he was working for John Rigby, and John Wilkes, who knew him in the late thirties, always referred to him as "Rigby's stocker", suggesting they had only one by this time. From 1927 onwards Thomas took on many re-stocking and stock repairing and refurbishment jobs for Wilkes as well as stocking several of their new guns. His last regular invoices to Wilkes were in 1934. His work was clearly visible on Dowding's Belgian gun which has a beautiful shape to the thumbhole and well-formed points, as well as fine chequering, all done by Shelley.

Shelley's invoices in the period from 1927 to 1934 show that he was restocking a sidelock for £3, charging an extra £1 to restock the fore-end; a boxlock restock costing typically £1 less. He also stocked newly made guns, where his charges varied depending on how much screwing and finishing was needed. The stocker could be called on to fit the trigger plate, to fit and regulate the triggers, to regulate the safety, to file up and fit the fore-end tail-pipe and diamond and make and fit all the pins. Depending on how much of this was involved, Shelley charged up to £5 for stocking new sidelocks and up to £3/10/0 for boxlocks.

John recalled him in the late thirties as being one of the craftsmen who always put their apron over their work whenever someone approached their bench. He remembered Shelley doing this quite fluently and without thinking. He had some other unusual behaviour in the workshop. He would bring his lunch into work each day between two metal plates. When lunchtime neared these would be placed over a candle and warmed through so he could have a hot meal. After lunch he would fix a long board into the vice on his bench at an angle to the vertical. Leaning against this he would go to sleep for a short while before resuming work in the afternoon. He was about 65 years old at the time so this rest may have helped him work through the day. Although there is no trace of Wilkes making significant use of his services throughout the late 1930s and the war years, in the late 1940s Wilkes gave a few Mauser rifle stocking jobs to Thomas Shelley, who by that time would have been in his early seventies. He died in Harrow in northwest London in 1959.

Engraving was a category of work that found a specific entry in the cash ledger. The conspicuous omissions from these pages are the invoices from Henry Kell. He usually invoiced monthly for the steady stream of small jobs that were taken round to him, engraving pins and repairing the engraving on guards after restocking and the like; and he further invoiced on completion the engraving of new guns, nearly always referencing these by the number of the gun, thereby allowing these costs to be easily assigned to particular guns. Payments to Kell were therefore collected amongst the trade invoices and did not appear in the wages section of the ledger.

Harry Kell

A great deal has been written elsewhere about Harry Kell – Christopher Austyn's book "Gun Engraving", for example has a whole chapter devoted to him, and I will not repeat that material here, confining this piece to his relationship with Wilkes and the work he did for them.

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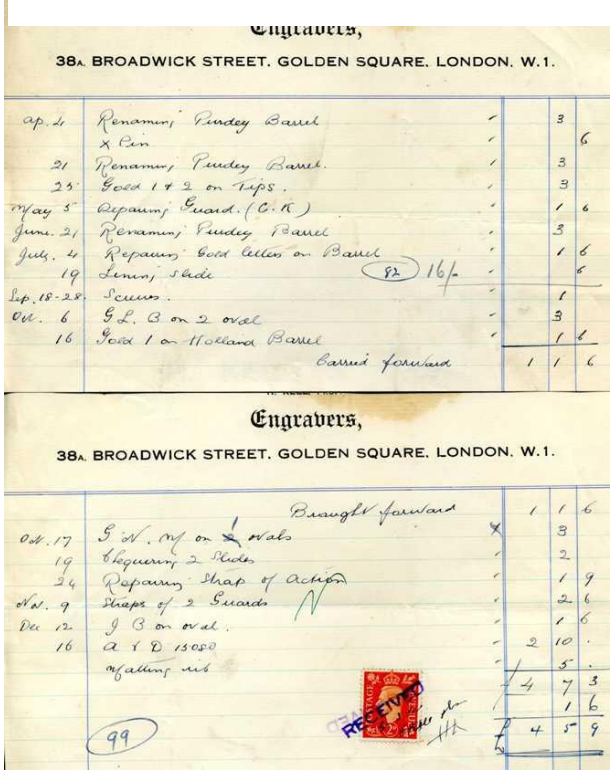
Kell's workshops first at 38a and then 45 Broadwick (Broad) Street were barely 2 minutes walk from Wilkes' shops at the time. Both John and Tom had frequent interactions with Kell and his assistants during the best part of twenty years up to his death in 1958, but their father Jack, for whom Kell was a contemporary, was probably as much a friend as a customer for his services. Harry was five years older than Jack, and like him had followed his father into the trade.

A Kell invoice from December 1939. At the end of a number of small items is the bill for engraving an A&D gun 15080.



Engravers,

38A. BROADWICK STREET. GOLDEN SQUARE. LONDON. W.1.

Ap. 4	Renaming Purdey Barrel		3	
	¼ Rib			6
21	Renaming Purdey Barrel.		3	
25	Good 1 & 2 on Tips.		3	
May 5	Repairing Guard. (C.R.)		1	6
June 21	Renaming Purdey Barrel		3	
July 4	Repairing Gold Letters on Barrel		1	6
19	Lining Slide (82) 16/-			6
Sep. 18-28	Screws.		1	
Oct. 6	G.L. B on 2 oval		3	
16	Gold 1 on Holland Barrel		1	6
	Carried forward	1	1	6

Engravers,

38A. BROADWICK STREET. GOLDEN SQUARE. LONDON. W.1.

	Brought forward	1	1	6
Oct. 17	G.W. M on ½ Wals		3	
19	Engraving 2 Slides		2	
24	Repairing Shape of Action		1	9
Nov. 9	Shape of 2 Guards		2	6
Dec 12	J B on oval.		1	6
16	A & D 15080	2	10	.
	Matting rib		5	.
		4	7	3
			1	6
		£ 4	5	9

99

RECEIVED

A feature of many of Wilkes' better guns in the 1930s was a pheasant, or sometimes a duck engraved by Kell on the bow of the guard. This one is on gun 14037.

Looking back on Kell from the 1970s and later; a time when gun engravers led by Ken Hunt were increasingly able to offer their work as art rather than ornament, with pricing and availability to match, the Wilkes brothers saw Kell and his contemporaries as the ultimate professional craftsmen, turning out top quality work to standard patterns quickly and at prices that were low enough to be absorbed in the cost of a best gun. The market for engraving started to change soon after the War, before Hunt's influence came to bear. In 1948 the renowned Birmingham engraver Henry Morris was turning down commissions for elaborate bespoke engraving if the customer was unwilling to pay a premium that reflected the significant extra work involved over and above that to execute a standard pattern [20]. Kell also was master at executing more elaborate designs, copiously described by Austyn, but these were to special order – the majority of guns made prior to the second war had standard engraving patterns which differed from maker to maker. Indeed the name of the maker was often used to identify the pattern; Wilkes guns engraved by Kell are recorded as having Purdey pattern scroll and flowers or Baker pattern scroll.

Wilkes used rose and scroll engraving on their standard best guns, both sidelock and boxlock, and many of these were engraved by Kell. For the period when detailed records exist from 1928 onwards, Kell engraved at least 80 Wilkes guns, almost all with standard patterns. A few these guns are identifiable as Kell's work by a single pheasant engraved on the bow of the guard, pictured walking away from the viewer, its form perfectly framed by the shape of the guard. But the majority of Kell's engraving on Wilkes and other maker's guns now goes unrecognised by

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auctioneers and dealers alike. It is usually only when a gun bears one his trademark special patterns that the engraving is attributed to him in the expectation of securing a higher price.

His charges in the 1930s were around £4/10/0 for full rose and scroll on a best sidelock, about 8% of manufacturing cost, and between £2/10/0 and £3/5/0 for a best boxlock. Kell charged slightly more than other engravers. For example, he was charging Grant & Lang £4/14/6 to put their standard pattern on a Grant best gun in 1937 whereas the Birmingham engraver William Woodroffe[17] was charging them £4/0/0 for the same pattern.

Tom recalled that on occasions where a gun needed to be finished quickly it would be possible to take it to Kell on a Monday morning and have the sidelock action back fully engraved with rose and scroll by Wednesday evening. To get it this quickly would involve calling in a favour but it could be done. Tom remembered taking a pair of barrels round to him for naming after the war. Harry did it whilst Tom waited, cradling the barrels in his left arm as he cut in the name, talking all the time he did it and hardly seeming to look at what he was doing.

Invoices from the 1950s from Kell are meticulously itemised; naming and ornamenting a pair of barrels was 5 shillings, just naming 3/6, and engraving 4 pins cost one shilling. John remembers feeling slightly put out by the meticulous detail of these bills – he would rather have paid more for the big items with the bits and pieces being thrown in free, but that was not how Harry did it.

After Harry Kell had left Broadwick Street in failing health in 1956 and moved his base to Purdey's factory, he continued to take on work for Wilkes. Jack then communicated with him mostly by letter at his home in Finchley in north London and copies of some of these are on file. In March 1957 he writes to Harry asking for a sketch and an estimate for a fully maned gold lion to adorn the magazine coverplate of a Mauser rifle. In June of that year he is writing to arrange a telephone call for a Saturday morning to discuss engraving an A&D gun, in November to alert Harry to the arrival of a parcel containing some parts that need the engraving on them repaired, and on 18th March of the 1958 he writes to alert Harry of the arrival in the post of a top lever and pin for engraving. He ends this last letter on file "With kindest regards and trust you are feeling better." Henry Albert Kell died on the 18th August that year.

The bar of a boxlock gun 15076 made in 1939 and engraved by Jacobson.

Payments to a number of other engravers did appear in the cash ledger, but many of these specialised in initialling and inscribing. The only gun engraver amongst them is M Jacobson who received regular, but by no means weekly, payments from the middle of 1932 through to the outbreak of the War, most of the payments corresponding to the cost of engraving a complete gun. Jacobson advertised himself as a general engraver and worked from his home at 15 Chipstead Gardens in Cricklewood, northwest London. His business card mentions that Platinum and Gold wedding rings were a speciality, but he was also a very competent gun engraver. There is no reference to him in Brown's books, nor in any of Dallas's books on the major London makers, nor is he mentioned by Austyn in his book on the subject of gun engraving. Guns recorded as engraved by Jacobson certainly survive – his rose and scroll engraving is very similar in style and quality to that of Kell and his assistants, but he does not seem to have undertaken any more elaborate styles. In addition to Jacobson, there are regular

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payments to an engraver by the name of R. Watson, who appears to have done lettering work, engraving ovals, snap caps and the like, and there are occasional un-itemised payments for engraving to the firm of Floyd & Pulsford for initialling.

Mrs Dowding's 16 bore, 13793, was one of many Wilkes guns engraved by Jacobson with fine rose and scroll. He usually worked on second quality guns but his work was first class. Photo courtesy of Gavin Gardiner Ltd.

The Family

The two partners, John William and Thomas Montgomery Wilkes, both made regular cash drawings and used the partnership account to pay certain of their domestic expenses. These payments were recorded in the ledgers and offset against their share of the profits when the partnership's financial year ended on each 31st August.

John's two sons, John and Tom, were just over fifteen and almost fourteen respectively on the outbreak of war in September 1939. From the stories that John told he must have been spending time acclimatising himself to the business before the outbreak of war because he had vivid recollections of a visit to Birmingham with his father in the 1930s. In particular he was struck by the terrible conditions in which some of the men there worked.

He recalled visiting an action shop, probably Bayliss's, and seeing a row of actioners filing action bodies, the swarf from their work piled in great pyramids around their vices, the men working away incessantly, adding to these piles as they did so. In another workshop there were three men, a father and his two sons, who only made fore-end snaps. A snap is made up of just four components, the pushrod, the spring, the tube that houses these two and the bolt that fits over the

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loop in the barrels. Gunmakers would buy these assemblies ready-made – a best snap in 1933 cost seven shillings, lower quality ones would be much cheaper. Wilkes was paying seven shillings for half a dozen of these lower grade components in 1936. A man would need to make 15 to 20 best snaps or 100 of the lower grade ones per week to cover his costs and take home enough to live on. These three couldn't afford a workshop, so had set up their bench in a blanked off corridor which had no natural light and was so narrow that they had to form a queue to go in to their bench space and the two at the end could only get out again once the one at the open end had moved out of the way.

Before entering another ground floor workshop, Jack told John to keep well back from the door when he opened it. Jack pushed open the door and ducked, thereby avoiding the hammer that came flying through the doorway as he did so. After this surprising greeting John went in to find a man waist deep in a pit dug in the floor. He was a spring maker who couldn't afford the wood to make a bench so instead had mounted his vice and anvil on the floor. By standing in the hole he had created these were then at a comfortable height. The purpose of the hammer throwing was simple. He believed any stranger visiting was bound to be a bearer of bad news. Everyone who knew him would know to expect the flying hammer and take the necessary avoiding action. So the hammer was a way to keep away selectively the bearers of bad news.

John also remembered the piles of springs he was making. His father asked for some and was told to take a handful in return for a shilling or two. Years later John would wax lyrical about springs He particularly admired the long mainsprings of old non-rebound locks, which were so perfectly regulated that their gentle arc would pull up straight as a die when the lock was moved to full cock. And he would stop and marvel at the life and lightness of a particular old top lever spring, always compared unfavourably with the dullness of some of their modern counterparts, especially the Spanish ones.

From a story that John would tell, it would seem that Jack had not been a regular visitor to Birmingham in the 1930s, although his contacts with the trade there were on daily basis by phone and letter. In one workshop they visited, its occupant reminded Jack that on his last visit he had forgotten to take his umbrella when he left. The umbrella was duly returned to Jack who this time took it with him. It was a bit dusty; it had been there for fifteen years.

Trade Suppliers

Wilkes' gunmaking, repair and refurbishment work in London required components and tools to keep it supplied, as did the need to keep the shop replenished to support their modest retail business. The purchase ledgers contain records of a steady stream of orders placed to keep these supplies flowing smoothly. As we have seen, Wilkes business was never on a scale where they could be described as having a production line, guns were individually made and the necessary components were usually acquired as and when they were needed, and from whatever sources Jack thought were best at the time. There were occasional bouts of speculative buying, the job lot of Harrison & Hussey stock being an example already encountered, but more normally components were acquired in anticipation of an immediate need for them and then in small volumes.

The London trade in the 1930s was well accustomed to gunmakers sourcing bits and pieces from one another to meet particular and unusual needs for parts, this practice embracing not just the established firms but also extending to many of the outworkers who operated as sole traders. In the following sections, some of the suppliers of the various component parts used by Wilkes to

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make their guns in the 1930s are identified along with a few details of the prices that these components fetched in at the time.

Barrel Tubes and Barrels

Wilkes would buy barrels either as machined tubes, sold in pairs, or as made up barrels, jointed and ribbed ready for the lumps to be machined. Tubes varied in quality and price. The best chopper lump tubes at the time were supplied by Vickers Armstrong, the customer specifying the length and weight of the tubes. These cost between £2/17/6 and £3/10/0 a pair in 1930 getting slightly cheaper as the decade progressed. Wilkes always seem to have ordered these for specific guns, they didn't hold them in stock. Walter Crathorn charged £3/10/0 to make up a pair of best barrels from Vickers tubes. BSA solid lump tubes were cheaper at £1/10/0 a pair and round bar tubes for making up dovetail lump barrels were £1/0/0 a pair. Crathorn charged another £1/10/0 a pair to make these up including fitting the extractors, and another pound for fitting them in so a basic re-barrelling cost about £4 using BSA tubes. Extractors were 2 shillings each for a pair of double leg forgings, used to make best extractors where the top leg was split and ran in a single hole; and half this price for single leg forgings, where each side had a separate top leg running in its own hole which was added after the extractor itself was made and fitted. Wilkes moved to favouring Webley & Scott barrels around 1932. A pair of filed dovetail barrels to specified length and choke cost £1/12/0, the chopper lump equivalent cost £3/10/0 with an extra 5 shillings for pigeon weight. Webley did a complete re-barrelling of a Holland & Holland 10 bore hammer gun with 12 bore 3" chambered barrels for £6/10/0, and George Mealey did the same job to a Claborough & Johnstone gun for £3/3/0.

Action Machinings

Whilst the Wilkes workshop always had a few action forgings lying around, these, by the 1930s, had become museum pieces. The starting point in this period was a machining, where the machinist took responsibility for sourcing the forging from which he made the parts that were delivered to the gunmaker. For the best machinings Wilkes used William Miles of 5 Price St in Birmingham, who supplied a sidelock action and fore-end machinings complete with fitted bolt, spindle and lever for £3/3/6. Without the lever-work these were 10 shillings cheaper. A similar price of £3/7/0 was charged by Bloomer for the action machining when he made up a Baker action self-opener for Wilkes, the machining itself being made by Pople. As with barrels, machinings came in a range of costs and qualities. George Mealey, who seems to have managed a brisk trade in component parts from various sources, was supplying Rogers action (i.e. sidelock) machinings for £1/4/0 each in 20, 16 and 12 bore sizes.

Joseph Asbury of Lench St was supplying Rogers machinings and fore end irons at 18 shillings per set, and screwed cross pin boxlock sets at 13/0 for 12 bore, 14/0 for 16 bore and 15/0 for 20 bore. Wilkes bought twelve machinings of various types from Asbury in 1933/4. He also undertook a few barrel machining jobs for Wilkes at around the same time, machining lumps of three barrels for 2 shillings per pair, and machining for extractors and chambering for 3 shillings per pair.

Furniture

Furniture, the ready-made assembly of trigger plate, triggers and guard, was sourced from several places but doesn't appear in the ledgers very often. On a new gun it was also sometimes supplied and fitted by the stocker, who didn't always itemise it on the invoice. Arthur Mellors was a furniture maker of Whittall St who sold boxlock furniture at 12 shillings a set, 12 sets being supplied to Wilkes in 1935. Roly Bloomer used to include the supply and fitting of furniture in

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the make-up of a sidelock gun usually charging between 18 and 23 shillings for it, and George Mealey made an allowance on his make up costs of 9 shillings if he was supplied with furniture. Not strictly included with the furniture but also part of the collection of components that are fitted by the stocker are the fore-end snaps and tail pipes. As we saw in the previous section, the snaps could be anything from just over a shilling to seven shillings or more, tail pipes were between 1 and 3 shillings depending on how elaborately they were filed. Bloomer supplied Wilkes with 6 best tail pipes in 1934 for 2/6 each.

Some of the boxlock furniture in stock in the shop in the 1970s had rocker safety mechanism already fitted. This cannot always have been the case because in November 1935 Wilkes ordered from the Birmingham maker Frederick Hadfield a dozen each of the three components of the rocker safety:- the cranks, the rockers and the springs for a total price of 4 shillings. Hadfield provided on the same order a dozen bolt forgings and half a dozen A&D machined tumblers for 4 and 6 shillings respectively.

Locks, Lock Repairs and Barrelled Actions

With locks as with everything else that went to make up a gun there was a wide range of qualities and prices varied accordingly. Chilton was used as the supplier for best locks, these coming in at £6 per pair in the 1930s. Orders specified whether the lock is of Boss or Holland pattern, the interceptors on the former engaging with a bent on the top of the tumbler, and on the latter blocking its fall from underneath. They also specified whether the locks were for double or single triggers, the latter usually requiring different sear and tumbler shapes. Chilton also supplied locks for Baker pattern self-openers for which they charged about £1 more. At this price, best locks were absorbing about 10% of the manufacturing cost of a best gun. It is hardly surprising that there was a brisk trade in lesser quality locks for guns other than the very best and Wilkes was in the market for this type of lock. The ones used by Wilkes were to the same designs as the best locks and are only readily distinguishable from them by the maker's stamp. Wilkes did not use on any of their 1930s vintage guns the cheaper designs of locks, such as those that used coil springs.

Wilkes' locks came from a variety of trade sources. In September 1930, Roland Bloomer supplied a pair of locks for £2/5/0 along with a set of beaded furniture for 18 shillings. In March 1933 Bloomer supplied seven pairs of locks for £19/0/0, and in April 1937 he supplied two more pairs at £5/15/0. In February 1934 Bloomer supplied a pair of Chilton .410 sized locks and a matching sized set of furniture for £3/8/6, both of which were then sent to Webley & Scott to use in the making of the .410 gun that was destined for Mr Dowding. Even Bob Henderson was a source of a pair of locks in January 1930 at £3/0/0. In 1931 George Mealey supplied 4 pairs of locks for two pairs of guns he was to action for £1/15/0 a pair in 16 and 20 bore sizes. The resulting guns were sold to Vaughan for £70 per pair, so the economics of using locks cheaper than the very best are self-evident.

Some eighty years later we can look back at the repair history of some of these second quality sidelocks and see that their reliability was not in any way affected by the use of locks that were somewhat cheaper than the very best.

Wilkes used both Chilton and Stanton for lock repairs during this period. A common repair was the fitting of new mainsprings to Purdey locks, a complex job that cost about 13/6. On a conventional lock, Chilton would fit a new tumbler and swivel for 18/3, and a new sear for 7 shillings. Harper was also used for those lock repairs that did not require specialist jigs and cutters.

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In the period before he was on payroll in 1934, George Mealey supplied a number of barrelled actions in 1931 onwards, ready for stocking. The basic prices of these were £15/0/0 for sidelock and £9/0/0 for boxlock, but from these figures were deducted any components, such as machinings, locks, barrel tubes or made up barrels, and furniture that Wilkes supplied, according apparently to some pre-agreed tariff. These were normally sent to other outworkers for making up into finished guns. Mealey also undertook some fairly major rebuilding projects, for instance in September 1931 he converted Purdey gun 12151 to ejector for £8/0/0.

Stock Blanks

Wilkes had a prodigious appetite for stock blanks, some for their own new guns but most for the steady stream of restocking jobs that were coming their way from the trade and their retail customers. They bought walnut in all grades from multiple sources.

In the 1930s the availability of good wood was higher than it is now, so it is unusually difficult today to gauge the quality of the wood Wilkes were buying from its price. The appetite for stocks has now moved towards highly figured and exhibition quality wood where the figure is the primary arbiter of attractiveness and price. Other factors such as the density of the wood, its proper seasoning, the closeness of its grain and its straightness through the hand, whilst still very important today were the dominant factors in selecting wood in the 1930s. Guns were being made to shoot and the gunmaker, if forced to choose between embellishment and function, would give highest priority to the latter. So some of the beautifully made guns that makers like Purdey and Holland produced in the 30s have stocks that, to today's eyes, look rather plain. In part this is due to the different factors used to select the wood in the 30s, but there is also the effect of the sheer volumes of best guns being made at the time to be taken in to account. There was only ever so much good wood in the market at one time, and only a minority of that would have exhibition grade figure along with all the other essential qualities. There was competition for it and those makers that produced fewer guns, like Boss and Woodward, could fit really well figured wood on a high proportion of their production. Purdey and Holland could not get enough to fit to all that they made so the customer paid extra for special wood and, as we can see today on those guns from the period still carrying their original stocks, not all chose to do so.

The blank used to stock this Grant cost £2/5/0 in the 1930s.

As a useful benchmark, Grant and Lang manufacturing records[17] for their London made guns, show that Grant best guns made in the 1930s were stocked with blanks costing between £1/15/0 and £3/10/0. Baker actioned Lancasters had stocks priced at the lower end of this range and second quality Lang boxlocks typically had blanks costing between 5 shillings and £1/10/0. In many instances we can see these stocks today. These maker's guns have good but not spectacular stocks, with well-developed figure but not usually the elaborate figuring that might be found on a Boss or Woodward of similar vintage. This is all a preamble to an account of some of the sources used by Wilkes for their stocks in this period.

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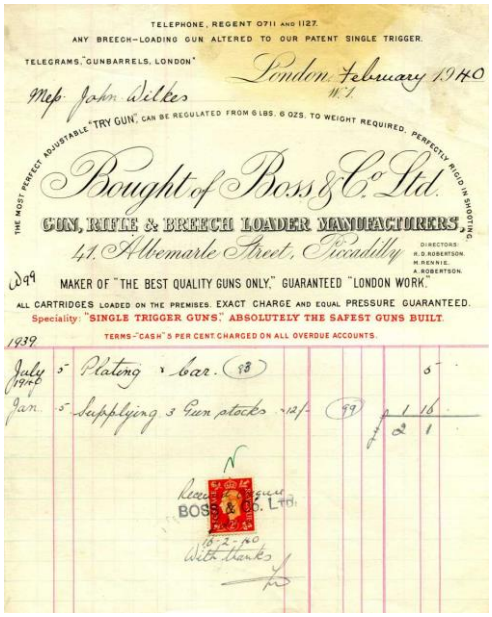
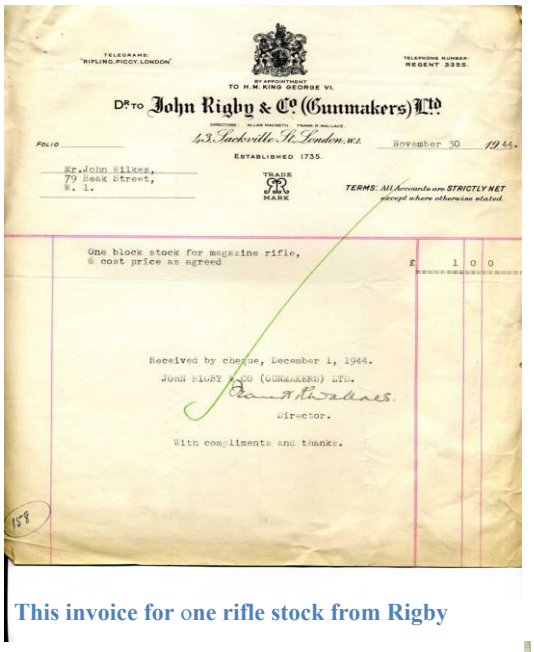
In 1928 Wilkes bought off A. Audibert, a stock dealer of Tottenham Court Road, a job lot of 156 "Rough Stocks" for £25/8/0, about 3 shillings each. The next bulk arrival was in 1930; the job lot from Harrison and Hussey including 58 stocks and 19 fore-ends. In late 1933, Webley supplied a pair of best stocks at £6 the pair and the dealer Theodore Montrieux of Bath St in Birmingham supplied a pair at the same price and another pair destined for Dowding's best pair of guns for £12/0/0, the most expensive stock blanks that Wilkes bought pre-war. Early the following year, Montrieux supplied 2 stocks at £2/10/each, and six at £1 each, and in May 1934 Grant & Lang supplied four best stocks at £4 each, twenty-five at £3 each eight at £1/10/0 each and one at £1/5/0. In 1935, another dealer, A Gerin, sold Wilkes 30 stocks at £1/8/0 each and 12 foreparts at 2/6 each and Webley supplied 3 pairs of stocks at £5/10/0 per pair and 6 singles at £2/5/0 each and a year later Webley supplied 36 lengthening pieces at 2/6 each. There are other occasional transactions involving single stock blanks traded or swapped with other makers where unusual requirements had to be met – a wide blank for a cross eye gun for example, but these are the main recorded transactions. Other stocks may have been purchased by cash sales – there was a buoyant trade amongst the outworkers in good walnut as a story in a later chapter about Woodward will illustrate.

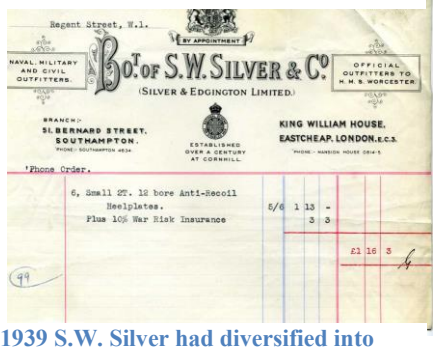

TELEPHONE, REGENT 0711 AND 1127.
ANY BREECH-LOADING GUN ALTERED TO OUR PATENT SINGLE TRIGGER.
TELEGRAMS, "GUNBARRELS, LONDON"
London. February 1940
Mess. John Wilkes
W.1
THE MOST PERFECT ADJUSTABLE "TRY GUN", CAN BE REGULATED FROM 6 LBS. 6 OZS. TO WEIGHT REQUIRED. PERFECTLY RIGID IN SHOOTING.
Bought of Boss & Co. Ltd.
GUN, RIFLE & BREECH LOADER MANUFACTURERS,
41 Albemarle Street, Piccadilly
DIRECTORS: H. D. ROBERTSON, M. RENNIE, A. ROBERTSON.
MAKER OF "THE BEST QUALITY GUNS ONLY," GUARANTEED "LONDON WORK."
ALL CARTRIDGES LOADED ON THE PREMISES. EXACT CHARGE AND EQUAL PRESSURE GUARANTEED.
Speciality: "SINGLE TRIGGER GUNS." ABSOLUTELY THE SAFEST GUNS BUILT.
TERMS—CASH" 5 PER CENT CHARGED ON ALL OVERDUE ACCOUNTS.
1939
July 5 Plating 1 bar. (88) 5
1940 Jan. 5 Supplying 3 Gun stocks 12/- (89) £1 16
£2 1
Received Cheque
BOSS & CO. LTD.
With thanks

During the war Wilkes bought several stock blanks from other makers. This invoice for 3 stocks at 12 shillings each is on Boss' rather elaborate stationery.


TELEGRAMS: "RIFLING, PICCY, LONDON"
BY APPOINTMENT TO H.M. KING GEORGE VI.
TELEPHONE NUMBER: REGENT 3355.
Dr to John Rigby & Co (Gunmakers) Ltd
DIRECTORS: WILLIAM RIGBY. FRANK D. WALLACE.
4.3. Sackville St. London. W.1. November 30 1944.
FOLIO
ESTABLISHED 1735.
Mr. John Wilkes, 79 Beak Street, W. 1.
TRADE MARK
TERMS: All Accounts are STRICTLY NET except where otherwise stated.
One block stock for magazine rifle, & cost price as agreed £ 1 0 0
Received by cheque, December 1, 1944.
JOHN RIGBY & CO (GUNMAKERS) LTD.
Director.
With compliments and thanks.
158

This invoice for one rifle stock from Rigby

Silver ovals seem to have been bought for stock, for example Harper supplied a dozen for 8 shillings in 1936, but gold ovals seem to have been bought more selectively, Bloomer supplying three 9 carat ovals for 5/6 each and three 18 carat ovals for 10/6 each. A bullion dealer in Hatton Garden was charging a little more than Bloomer asking 7/6 for a 9 carat oval and Harper supplied two for 6/0 each. Ebonite heel plates were bought from S.W.Silver at 156 Fenchurch St, costing 3/9 each for ½" thick and pro rata for different thicknesses. Recoil pads from the same supplier, the Silver's Pad, cost 5/6 each. Although once a gunmaker, Silver's business had diversified; the supply of recoil pads being their surviving service to the gun trade.


Regent Street, W.1.
BY APPOINTMENT
NAVAL, MILITARY AND CIVIL OUTFITTERS.
Bot. of S.W. SILVER & Co.
(SILVER & EDGINGTON LIMITED)
OFFICIAL OUTFITTERS TO H.M.S. WORCESTER
BRANCH: 51, BERNARD STREET, SOUTHAMPTON.
ESTABLISHED OVER A CENTURY AT CORNHILL.
KING WILLIAM HOUSE, EASTCHEAP, LONDON, E.C.3.
'Phone Order.
6, Small 2T. 12 bore Anti-Recoil Heelplates. 5/6 1 13 -
Plus 10% War Risk Insurance 3 3
£1 16 3
99

By 1939 S.W. Silver had diversified into many trades as this elaborate invoice shows.

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Proof, Polishing, Hardening and Browning

Although more of outworker services than supplies, these important steps in the making of guns appear in the order books from time to time, although it is only rarely possible to attach an invoice to a particular gun.

As a London maker Wilkes used exclusively the Gunmaker's Company London Proof House. Whilst they had no dealings directly with the Birmingham Proof House, a majority of the Birmingham made guns that the firm sold were proved there by their makers. The charge for proof in London was 1/6 per double barrelled firearm in most cases. If barrels were sent for both provisional and definitive proof at the same time, the charge was 2/0. With several of their repair jobs requiring re-proof, it was not uncommon for Wilkes to submit 20 guns and rifles for proof a month.

For polishing, hardening and bluing, which at this time was usually charcoal blueing rather than soda blacking, Wilkes used in the 1930s two specialists in Birmingham, H.Pitt and J. Flavell. Pitt was used in the late 20s and early 30s, the two then traded jointly for a short while around 1934/35 and then Flavell seems to have succeeded to Wilkes' business, perhaps because he seems to have been charging slightly less. Invoices were mostly referencing notes so costs of actual work is only sometimes itemised. Pitt charged £2/10/0 for part polishing and hardening a pair of sidelocks in 1935, Flavell charged half this amount for a single gun but that included a complete polishing job. For just hardening a sidelock, Pitt charged 16/0 and 8/6 for a boxlock. Flavell charged just 7/6 for a boxlock and that included postage. Whether the two were competing as this rather limited set of data might imply is hard to tell. They were performing an important part of the process of finishing a gun and we can be certain that Jack Wilkes would have been more concerned about the quality of the result than the price. If the hardener gets an action too hot he can easily do irreparable damage.

A Boss Story

A story that Tom told about Boss & Co serves to illustrate this as well as illuminating the extraordinary collective skill present in their factory in the 1930s

Boss were finishing a gun one afternoon; its customer was coming to the shop to collect it for shooting early the next morning. The finisher was reassembling the gun after hardening. One of the lock plates had set during hardening so there was a gap between the plate and the back of the action. In trying to set the lock plate back to where it should be, the finisher broke it through the corner of the bar. In most workshops this near disaster would have taken days to repair. A new lock as supplied by the lock maker was taken from the stock cupboard. Boss used jigs very extensively when making up guns so that all parts, although fitted precisely to the gun for which they were made, were actually very similar in size. The new lock was fitted in to the action and regulated and filed to shape, a stocker then let it in to the existing stock head, and made a new side nail. The finisher then filed it down smooth with the already hardened action. The plate was stripped and the plate itself polished. Whilst the lock work was hardened and polished, Jack Sumner, who at the time was working in the factory, engraved the plate to match the gun. A couple of pairs of old leather shoes that were lying around the factory were cut up, and the plate once engraved, was packed along with the bridle and side nail amongst the shredded leather in a pot which was then put into the kiln and brought to the hardening temperature. After a suitable wait, the plate was quenched, lacquered and the lock reassembled and fitted, this time without incident. All this was done in one afternoon. The customer got his gun the next morning.

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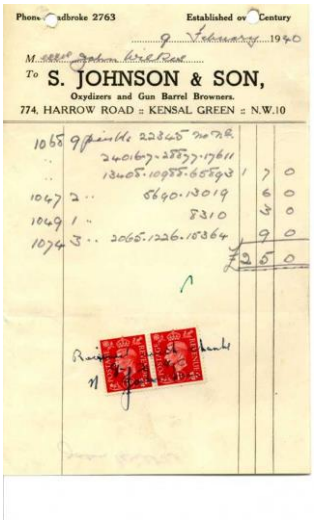
The final category of specialist work to be carried out on a new gun, as well as during many refurbishments, was Barrel Browning. It was still so called even though by the 1930s the majority of the work was blacking. All was done by Samuel Johnson, who was followed into the business by his sons. The family firm continues to provide this service to the trade today. Invoices were settled once or twice a month and typically amounted to about £4 per month in the 1930s. There is no information in the ledgers as to the unit costs of blacking; all invoices recorded were for an unspecified number of tickets, each ticket relating to one or more barrels. Some invoices survive from 1939 which show that at the start of the war blacking a pair of shotgun barrels cost 3/6 and an automatic pistol cost 3/0.


Phone: Sudbroke 2763 Established over Century

9 February 1940

To S. JOHNSON & SON,

Oxydizers and Gun Barrel Browners.

774, HARROW ROAD :: KENSAL GREEN :: N.W.10

1068 9 pistols 22345 nos 7/6. 2401697-2887717611 13405.10955.68593 1 7 0

1067 2 .. 6640.13019 6 0

1069 1 .. 8310 3 0

1074 3 .. 2065.1226.10364 9 0

£1 5 0

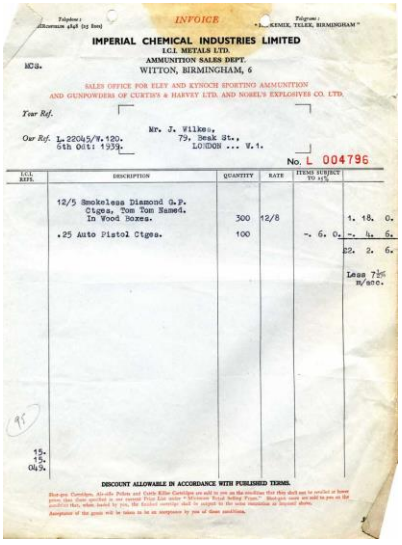
A 1940 Invoice from Johnson for barrel blacking

Ammunition

Ammunition in the 1930s was relatively much more expensive than it is today. Eley Grand Prix had a similar market position in the 1930s to that held by the brand in more recent times. In 1933 Wilkes best boxlock cost the same as 7000 Grand Prix and a master gunmaker would work for a week for the price of 750 of these cartridges.

Although Wilkes made a steady stream of sales of ammunition for both guns and rifles to their retail customers throughout the 1930s, the evidence in the ledgers suggests they never set out to hold much in the way of stock, so orders to their suppliers very much reflect the scale and frequency of orders placed with them by their customers. In some cases ammunition was ordered specifying shipment direct to the customer. The business seems to have been rather marginal, suggesting that Wilkes saw this as a service to customers that was necessary to stop them straying elsewhere, rather than a means of adding significantly to the profitability of their retail business.

Two examples of deliveries from ICI, who supplied both gun and rifle ammunition, serve to illustrate this. A batch of 700 Grand Prix cartridges was shipped direct to a customer in August 1933. These were invoiced to Wilkes by ICI at 11/10 per 100 plus carriage of 4/1 on the whole batch, and sold to the customer at 13/6 per hundred, making a profit of under seven shillings on a sale of £4/14/6, about 7%. Captain Noakes, who bought ammunition by the thousand, had a special load made up by ICI, consisting of a 16 bore 2¾" Gastight case loaded with 1 oz of 5½ size shot and 33 grains of powder. Wilkes made a slightly higher margin on this. A batch of 1000 of these ordered in January 1935 cost Wilkes £8/4/4 including carriage, and was sold and shipped direct to the customer for £9/15/0, a margin of about 15%.


INVOICE

IMPERIAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES LIMITED

I.C.I. METALS LTD.

AMMUNITION SALES DEPT.

WITTON, BIRMINGHAM, 6

SALES OFFICE FOR ELEY AND KYNOCH SPORTING AMMUNITION AND GUNPOWDERS OF CURTIS'S & HARVEY LTD. AND NOBEL'S EXPLOSIVES CO. LTD.

Your Ref.

Our Ref. L.2204/5/V.120. 5th Oct: 1939.

Mr. J. Wilkes, 79, Beak St., LONDON ... W.1.

No. L 004796

I.C.I. REFS.	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	RATE	ITEMS SUBJECT TO 15%	
	12/5 Smokeless Diamond G.P. Ctges. Tom Tom Named. In Wood Boxes.	300	12/8		1. 18. 0.
	.25 Auto Pistol Ctges.	100		-. 6. 0.	-. 4. 6.
					22. 2. 6.
					Less 7½ m/anc.

15. 15. 0½

DISCOUNT ALLOWABLE IN ACCORDANCE WITH PUBLISHED TERMS.

An ICI invoice from 1939 for Wilkes own brand of ammunition, Tom Tom

Margins may have been slightly higher than this as ICI seems to have operated a retrospective discount scheme based on volume that was typically 6 to 8%. By 1936 ICI were supplying own brand shotgun ammunition to Wilkes, their Tom Tom brand apparently replacing Grand Prix in the order books. Initially this came in at 11/10 per 100, but by 1937 this

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had gone up to 12/8, at which time ICI's own Gastight brand cost 2 shillings more. Through much of the decade ammunition orders with ICI were running at around £100 per year.

Another supplier with whom Wilkes placed orders between 1927 and 1934 were F.A.Hughes & Co. Brown[7] lists Hughes as a Powder manufacturer at 204-206 Great Portland Street around 1930, but later in the decade they were describing themselves as General Merchants, by that time having moved a short distance to Baker St. In the early part of the decade they supplied Wilkes with cartridges that were branded by the colour of the case, Wilkes specifying this along with the depth of the head, and the powder and shot charge. Usually the powder specified was Walsrode. Hughes priced very similarly to ICI, and they also supplied ammunition printed with the retailer's name and address, some of the orders being marked "named". Business with Hughes fell away in the mid-thirties but did not die out. Perhaps their proximity, they were under a mile from Beak Street, made them a useful stop-gap supplier of ammunition.

As a general merchant they were sometimes called upon to provide other items. In February 1931 they sold Wilkes a 33" x 1" Artillery Offices sword, No 132, in a leather scabbard for £1/17/6. In a similar line, an umbrella maker, Jean Saal & Co of Hatfield Street in Clerkenwell supplied Wilkes occasionally with sword sticks, costing £1/4/0 in ebony but only 17/0 in oak, and walking stick guns.

Periodically customers would ask Wilkes to provide reloading components and these were usually ordered from Nobel Industries, although Hughes and ICI supplied primed cases. Rifle ammunition was on occasions purchased from other gunmakers, both Rigby and Jeffery helping out, sometimes with just a few rounds for zeroing a rifle, on others providing full packs.

Cases and Leatherware

As has already been mentioned Wilkes used Philip Lewey as a source for their best cases, but they were not their only supplier.

Philip Lewey & Sons

Philip George Lewey was born in 1849, the son of a cigar manufacturer, and became a cabinet maker, apparently specialising in making the chests in which the Victorians shipped and displayed their elaborate tableware and fine china. He married in1871, and his wife Julia gave birth to eleven children in the next twenty years. In the 1901 census he still declares himself as a "fancy cabinet maker" and an employee of someone else, but a year later Brown[7] records Lewey as trading on his own account along with two of his sons as Philip Lewey and Sons, a plate chest and gun case maker. Initially his premises were close to where he lived in Peckham in southeast London. By 1903 he moved to the centre, Brown reports him establishing premises in Little Howland Street close to Tottenham Court Road in Central London. He was an early adopter of the telephone for in the 1904 directories he is shown at 104 Tottenham Court Road, describing himself as a Plate Chest maker. The two sons that joined him in this business were Walter who was born in 1877 and Bertie, born 5 years later. In 1909 the firm moved again, to 142 Wardour Street in Soho. All the time they were at the Tottenham Court Road address, their phone book entry showed them as plate chest makers, this switching to gun case makers after the move into Soho.

It seems likely that gun case making and plate chest making were carried on together by the business for a while. By 1911 the father and his two sons were all at different addresses; Philip and Walter describing themselves as gun case makers, but Bertie describing himself as a cabinet maker and fitter working in the "Gun case and plate chest trade". Philip Lewey died in 1914 at the age of 64, leaving the business to be carried on by two of his sons. He left a modest estate of just under £1200.

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The firm of Philip Lewey & Sons was an important supplier of cases to the London gun trade throughout the inter-war years. They made several moves during this period, moving from Soho back to the Tottenham Court Road area to premises in Whitfield St in 1926, followed by a move to 71 Endell St in 1929. This road is to the east of Soho, close to Covent Garden and runs north from Long Acre to High Holborn. Much of the southern end of it has now been redeveloped, but the northern end, where Lewey's two premises were located, still has small shops of Victorian and earlier vintages. Although now much gentrified, Endell St in the 1930s was very similar to Soho, providing sensible accommodation for artisan trades. Lewey stayed at number 71 until 1943, then making the move further down the road to numbers 33 and 35, where they were to stay until the business closed in 1953. The trade was very depressed after the war and the two brothers by then were both in their seventies, so retirement probably was the only option open to them. They lived for some time in retirement, Bertie dying in 1970 aged 88, and Walter a year later at the age of 94.

A Lewey lightweight case from the 1930s.

Wilkes used Lewey as the maker of cases for the majority of their better grade guns. Although Lewey could and did supply them with the very best oak and leather cases, notably those for some of Mr Dowding's guns, the case that Wilkes preferred was their leather lightweight. This was made of moulded heavy grade leather and had slightly rounded edges and well-rounded leather corner reinforcements. It was normally supplied without straps but with two brass latches. This came into the shop at a price of £3/3/0 in the 1930s and was normally sold with a gun for £5/0/0. Lewey also made leather goods other than cases. In the war years they did a significant amount of business with Wilkes supplying holsters and other harnesses for weapons for concealed use by agents.

Frank Clark, who was a leather goods manufacturer in Peckham Rye in south east London, offered a range of gun cases, although these were just a part of their business. Wilkes used them heavily in the late 20s but then gradually shifted more of their business at the top end to Lewey, leaving Clark to supply the models that Wilkes used when off the shelf cases and slips were needed. Their Willesden case was available in a variety of shapes and finishes, which influenced cost. Looking through the orders to Clark, no two seem to have cost the same. For example it was available in canvas with leather trimmings at £1/1/0 as a gun case and 18 shillings as a plain full length bolt rifle case. Clark also supplied better quality cases, a leather case with brass corners for £2/5/0 and a best leather case for £2/17/6 and they undertook various repair and refitting jobs.

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Robert Bryant, who had been in business as gun case makers for a century or more by the late 20s, seems to have attracted only occasional orders from Wilkes in the 1930s and then for mostly for rather specialised items like cases for telescopic sights. There was one order for a leather case and cover for £4/3/6 in 1934, but otherwise most of the best case orders went to Lewey. Bryants were to become much more significant suppliers after the war.

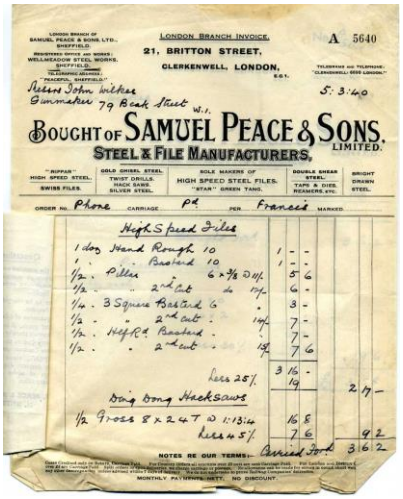
For the better quality accessories that went into cases, snap caps, oil bottles, cleaning rods, jags, mops and brushes Wilkes used Hawksley. A pair of horn snap caps cost 3 shillings, as did an oil bottle. A best ebony cleaning rod with four fittings cost 7/6 and a horn snapping block cost 2/3. Lightwoods were competitive suppliers to Wilkes mainly at the lower end of this market, and they and Salter & Varge supplied certain specialist consumables like gun cleaning products. A dozen small "Valvespout" cans of Young's oil cost 11/6 and the same number of 3oz tins of "3-in-1" lubricating oil cost 10/6. Both Lightwood and Hawksley provided leather items like cartridge bags and belts.

Continental Guns and Rifles

Although not specialising in the retailing of guns made in Europe and America, Wilkes were willing suppliers of such firearms on order from customers and also had a steady demand for components if these came in for repair or alteration. LePersonne supplied them with the occasional Browning automatic gun, which cost £5/17/0 in 1931, and with Mannlicher Schönauer rifles, spares and ammunition. Salter & Varge supplied spares for automatic pistols and Modern Arms Co with air rifles and spares.

Workshop Supplies

Beak Street was in easy walking distance of a number of specialist retail outlets serving light engineering trades and a large proportion of Wilkes consumables were purchased over the counter with petty cash, leaving an incomplete paper trail to posterity. But a few invoices from 1939 onwards survive and from these can be pieced together a picture of where Wilkes sourced their workshop consumables. The tabulation in Appendix 6 shows the general workshop suppliers whose invoices survive from the period between 1939 and 1955. Also shown is a rough distance from the Beak St shop. There were abundant and competitive sources for many of the consumables that a workshop like Wilkes would need, illustrating well the attractiveness of Soho as a location for a gunmaker. In post war years these suppliers would gradually close down. Although several survived into the seventies and beyond, they have now mostly been replaced by more fashionable outlets selling less useful things.


LONDON BRANCH INVOICE.
A 5640
21, BRITTON STREET,
CLERKENWELL, LONDON,
Messrs John Wilkes
Gunmaker 79 Beak Street W.1.
5: 3: 40
BOUGHT OF SAMUEL PEACE & SONS LIMITED.
STEEL & FILE MANUFACTURERS.
ORDER No. Phone CARRIAGE Pd PER Francis MARKED
High Speed Files
1 doz Hand Rough 10 1 - -
1 " " Bastard 10 1 - -
½ " Pillers 6 x ⅜ D/M. 5 6
½ " " 2nd Cut " 1/M. 6 -
½ " 3 Square Bastard 6 " 3 -
½ " " 2nd cut " 1/M. 7 -
½ " High R.S. Bastard " 7 -
½ " " 2nd cut " 1/S. 7 6
less 25% 3 16 -
19
2 17 -
Ding Dong Hacksaws
½ Gross 8 x 24 T D 1:13:14 16 8
less 45% 7 6
9 2
Carried Fwd 3 16 2
NOTES RE OUR TERMS.
MONTHLY PAYMENTS NETT. NO DISCOUNT.

Samuel Peace & Sons were a specialist file and steel supplier in Clerkenwell. This 1940 order, for five dozen files for under £3, was unusually large. Wilkes often bought files in smaller quantities from Soho retailers.

An exception to the practice of buying for petty cash was the business in the early 1930s with the engineering and jewellery supplier, Ch. Ramstein. Wilkes was to patronise Ramstein well into the 1950s, but in the early 1930s, they did so by placing orders with them which leaves a trail of invoices. They used Ramstein mainly for supplying files, which cost between sixpence and 1/6 each; and abrasive paper, glass paper costing 9 pence per dozen sheets and Hubert's emery paper

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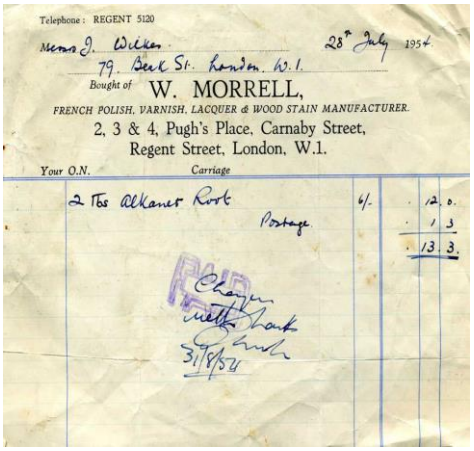
costing two shillings for the same amount. There was no attempt at bulk buying; emery paper was bought six sheets at a time.


Telephone: REGENT 5120

Messrs J. Wilkes 28th July 1954

79. Beak St. London. W.1.

Bought of W. MORRELL,

FRENCH POLISH, VARNISH, LACQUER & WOOD STAIN MANUFACTURER.

2, 3 & 4, Pugh's Place, Carnaby Street,
Regent Street, London, W.1.

Your O.N.	Carriage		
2 lbs Alkanet Root		4/-	12. 0.
	Postage		1 3
			13 3.

Cheque with thanks
31/8/54

Although from the 1950s, this invoice for alkanet root shows the ready availability of specialist supplies in the immediate vicinity of the shop. Why it was posted from 200 yards away is a mystery.

A story John was to tell half a century later had a certain ironic ring to it. He was commenting on how Boss & Co always seemed to make things as difficult as possible for themselves. The particular story concerned Bill Wise, who worked for Boss for all his life and was a close personal friend of both Wilkes brothers. When he was in transit from Boss's factory, at the time just south of the river in Southwark, to House Bros, a traditional ironmongers and tool shop in Beak Street, Bill would always call in on Wilkes in passing. On one of these visits in the late 1960s he proudly announced that he was on his way to buy six sheets of emery paper. By this time Wilkes bought their abrasive papers wholesale by the quire (24 sheets) in each grade - they had a whole cupboard full of it. It seemed risible to John that Bill was spending an hour or more out of his day to fetch just six sheets. He probably hadn't realised that 35 years earlier his father had done much the same.

An invoice from the 1930s, which will have significance in the future, was for the supply of a 2hp electric motor, pulley and starter for £8. This motor, which was for driving a single machine tool at the time of its purchase, will figure again in our story, indeed it was one of the few items left behind in the shop when Wilkes vacated it in 2003.

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Chapter 9 – War and its Aftermath 1940 – 1949

Business in Decline

Previous chapters began with a breakdown of gun production in the period in question. For 1940 to 1950 this is relatively simple. Wilkes produced perhaps as many as six and possibly as few as four guns, all of them A&Ds, bearing their name in this decade. Indeed Wilkes own gun production would not resume in significant numbers for 35 years, by which time the dependence on the Birmingham trade would be greatly reduced. The uncertainty in numbers arises because the wartime years marked the start of a rather haphazard approach to entering details of new firearms made in the register, a trend that sadly would persist for the next sixty years.

1940 also marked the end of the sale of new Wilkes guns to dealers. The last new Wilkes gun sold to Vaughan was a 20 bore hammerless ejector 15070, supplied by Bayliss and sold on 7th March 1941 for £18/10/0. Vaughan still held a stock of their new guns; in June 1941 Wilkes took in for stripping and cleaning six of these, all boxlocks which had been supplied in the preceding five years, along with several guns of other makes. They must have become shop soiled, possibly by bomb damage. They were returned promptly to Vaughan, 4/6 per gun being charged for the work.

Business in the 1940s was therefore set to be very different from the previous decade. Work on servicing and repairing sporting guns did not stop at the outbreak of war, and it provided a steady stream of underlying business; enough to keep up a flow of jobs to the stocker Dickie Bolter and the barrel filer Harry Wheeler. But this was gradually overtaken by a much more urgent and higher volume of war work. Wilkes was a small business. Counting both of Jack's sons, who were still very much learning the trade in the early war years, there were but five people available in total (S. Whiteman having joined the payroll in early 1940, replacing Messrs Moore and Gridley), and not all of them could be at the bench all of the time. Wilkes needed war work on a scale that was not going to swamp their capacity, and that seems to be what they found.

Long after the war, John, whose earliest real exposure to the trade had been during the war years, would look back on how Wilkes had handled their business as a lost opportunity. He felt that both his father and uncle viewed war work as a civil duty, an attitude that led them to believe that it should be charged out to the various Government agencies that commissioned it at little more than cost. The ledgers don't entirely bear this out, but John clearly felt that the work could have been more profitable than it was. Whilst this may have been true for the special jobs undertaken by Wilkes, the standard repetitive jobs were all done at set prices agreed for the trade at large. John believed that other practitioners had had used war work to build some financial reserves to help them through the terrible trading conditions at the end of the decade once this work disappeared. There are echoes here perhaps of John's great grandfather and the American Civil War some eighty years earlier.

The invoice book for late 1939 shows no impact of the war whatsoever. Mr Dowding bought a Browning 5 shot, the Horne family came in one at a time with multiple repairs and alterations and Captain Noakes continued to buy his special load cartridges. There are a few new trade customers, both Boss and Purdey asked Wilkes to take on repairs to guns not of their manufacture, and Harrods sent a few repairs in, but there was certainly nothing like the flurry of work on side arms that heralded the start of the 1914 war.

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Henry Atkin Ltd.

On the 20th January 1940 there is an invoice to Henry Atkin, a firm for whom Wilkes had done occasional jobs over the years and who had also been supplied with a small number of guns and rifles, but they had never been a large trade customer.

This invoice reads:-

> *25 stocks, 25 trigger plates. Lewis gun.*
> *Renovating stocks and grips, blacking oil bottles and trigger plates.*
> *3/0 each - £3/15/0*

This was to be the first of a flurry of such invoices. About 5% of the stocks also needed repair and these were charged 1/0 extra. In 1940 Wilkes would do this job on no fewer than 5000 Lewis guns, bringing in a total of £750. The ledgers reveal that all of this work was done in house, and consumable costs would have been quite modest, so this was probably reasonably profitable business for Wilkes if they could do these jobs in under an hour each. The work from Atkin was to continue into 1941, but alongside a stream of Lewis gun refurbishment, Wilkes also started fitting Bren gun stock clips for them at 10/6 per set. Almost 500 sets of Bren gun clips were fitted and a further 1000 Lewis gun refurbishments were invoiced to Atkin in 1941, about £400 in all, the work petering out towards the fourth quarter of the year but building again in 1942 and continuing thereafter but never again reaching the volumes of 1940. Amongst this flurry of war work Atkin were also sending round a small but regular flow of gun repairs. Unfortunately Masters' book[23] glosses over Henry Atkin's involvement in war work, so we don't know the full extent of the work they were commissioned to do on these two models of machine gun, and what proportion of it was passed on to Wilkes.

This was the first experience Wilkes had with soda blacking. Prior to that work to be blacked was sent to Birmingham, where it was usually charcoal blued. Although the latter technique was occasionally tried in Beak St, it made such a mess that it was quickly abandoned in favour of hot soda blacking. John remembered the early experiments in the workshop with a soda blacking pot, which was a rectangular iron cauldron over a gas ring, the latter surrounded by a cast iron tray to catch drips – or at least some of them. Prolonged use of the pot would cause the mixture within it to evaporate and thicken at which point, unless diluted in time, it could start spitting like the lava from a volcano. As it contained crystalline caustic soda and sodium nitrate made into a paste with only a small amount of water, the risk of getting a nasty burn was ever present. At the end of the first day on which they had used the pot, John remembered coming up the workshop to find Uncle Tom washing his hands in the cooling mixture, apparently finding it unusually effective at removing dirt and grease.

As war work occupied the workshops of other London makers, they too started looking round to see where they could get their gun repairs done. We have mentioned a few of these already but Army and Navy Stores started sending a steady stream of simple repair work to Wilkes for a period in 1940, and work also started to come in modestly from Jeffery. Vaughan continued to send round a steady supply of repair and refurbishment work.

The decline in the repetitive but high volume work from Atkin might have caused an awkward hiatus in Wilkes' business, but by mid-1941 they were well into another line of work, one that would keep them going for several more years.

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Secret Work – DON

The Special Operations Executive (SOE) was an organisation formed in 1940 in the utmost secrecy with the purpose of organising and resourcing clandestine operations behind enemy lines. It was staffed by a combination of military and civilian personnel. One of its earliest activities was to create a supply chain for weapons, mostly small arms which could be dropped to agents in enemy territory. For obvious reasons these could not be of standard British military issue. Whilst most were unmodified, some were developed specifically for clandestine use, an activity that was conducted as part of a larger research and development activity overseen by SOE. This aspect of the history of the organisation has recently been described in a book by Boyce and Everett[6]. Whilst the very existence of SOE was a closely guarded secret, the accumulation of a large number of weapons was an activity that required some legitimate cover. The person initially charged with doing this was Major Hugh B.C. Pollard, a well-known writer on and collector of guns who was an almost exact contemporary of Burrard. He enlisted his friend Robert Churchill to help with the initial collection of suitable weapons, operating for this purpose from an address in the War Office.

Pollard had the dubious distinction of having been made a Don by General Franco in recognition for his services to the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War. Needing a codename for his department, Pollard chose the name Don, which seems to have been written more frequently as either DON or D.O.N. Early in the war the government had commandeered a number of large houses in grounds around London, and the weapons development activities of SOE were concentrated at a number of sites to the north of the capital near St Albans and Welwyn. Boyce and Everett pinpoint Bride Hall, a few miles northeast of St Albans as the location of Station VI, the home of its Arms Section from mid-1941. Prior to this, its armoury had been initially in Central London, before being moved to another requisitioned property, The Frythe, near Welwyn for a few months. Both Pollard and Churchill had left SOE before the end of 1940, their activities being taken over by Lt Col. Tomlinson.

John Wilkes' ledgers show that on 7th January 1941, a Lt Col J. Noel Tomlinson of the Royal Engineers, giving his address as the War Office, was invoiced for 5 shotgun cases in leather bound canvas, a special holster as per drawing for a 45 Colt automatic pistol, 500 Tom-Tom cartridges and the freeing of a Churchill gun. Lewey supplied the cases for £1/9/0 each and did the leather covering of the holster, for which they charged 19/0, Wilkes selling them for £1/19/0 and £1/10/0 respectively. Whether this order was to test Wilkes or whether they were told up front what was likely to follow we don't know. Between the start of 1941 and July 1945, Tomlinson and his two successors at the War Office were to place about five orders per month on average with Wilkes. These would total just over £6600 in value in the next 54 months and would constitute between 31% and 57% of the firm's annual turnover until the end of the war.

Tomlinson was to be succeeded in his role of procuring weapons for SOE by Capt E.J. Rowat in January 1942, who in turn was succeeded by Major J. Kendal in June 1943, the last of these continuing in this capacity to the end of the war. The address they used was DON at Room 055A, the War Office, Whitehall. It is hard now to imagine the secrecy that surrounded SOE's activities. Their very existence was known only to a few. John remembered one of the three principals, probably Rowat, being so intent on preserving the secrecy of the work that was being done that he would visit the shop in disguise. He would not knock and wait at the door as other customers did, instead he would phone ahead to give precisely the time of his arrival. When the moment arrived he would walk past the shop quickly, knocking the door as he passed but walking on by. Exactly 30 seconds later he would walk past the shop in the other direction, this time expecting the door to be opened for him at the precise moment of his passing so that he could slip

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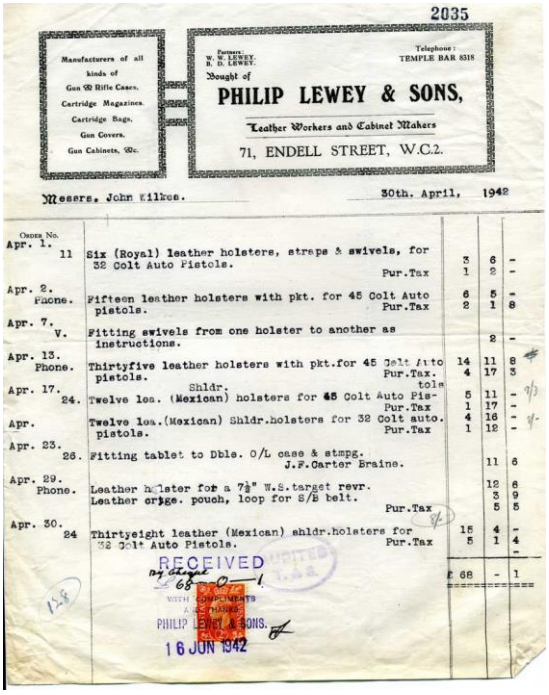
inside and the door be closed immediately behind him. It is hard to imagine how anyone witnessing this piece of theatre could fail to have their suspicions aroused.

All three, Tomlinson, Rowat and Kendal also placed modest amounts of business with Wilkes as private customers. This would require a certain amount of *post hoc* unravelling from the government funded work. In Rowat's case this private business went on into the 1950s, when he was to buy from Wilkes one of their few immediately post war made guns in 1957.

Wilkes were to become involved in the servicing and repair of an enormous number of small arms, mostly pistols for use by agents working in enemy occupied territories in Europe and further afield. They would service the weapons, prepare them for shipment, and provide holsters for them, and they would also undertake special modifications for their use in clandestine operations. The work came in a steady stream. After a ramp-up in 1941, the levels in the next three years were quite steady, only starting to fall away after the German surrender in 1945. Immediately after Tomlinson's first order in January 1941, DON purchased a BSA .22 target rifle and .22 revolvers by Hopkins & Allen. The first big invoice included double 4 Bore and double 8 bore guns, each in fitted wood chests, as well as two .22 Martini rifles and 10,000 airgun pellets. 50 rounds of ammunition in the large bore calibres and a dozen woodpigeon decoys were also required a few weeks later, as was another 4 bore gun, in a wood chest with 50 cartridges.

At the same time there is an invoice for 30 double hand stitched holsters for 8" barrelled Lugers and 90 for the 4" barrelled version. Like many orders to follow, these were supplied by Lewey, on this occasion for £34, to be invoiced to DON at £54. In total Lewey would provide Wilkes over the next four years with goods to the cost of £1,700 for the business on this account, about a third of the total DON turnover. Mostly they were asked to provide holsters straps and other leatherwork, occasionally pistol cases and the like. By the end of March 1941 Wilkes were supplying several automatic pistols and more holsters to special designs. And in early April comes the first order from DON for lubricating and preserving oils, commodities for which they would develop an insatiable appetite. The first order is quite modest, 3 one pound tins of white Vaseline and a gallon of lubricating oil. Captain Rowat makes his first appearance in April to buy a best Sam Browne belt for £1/14/0 but Col Tomlinson would remain the principal for DON for the rest of the year. Coincidentally perhaps there was suddenly a steady stream of Army officers coming into the shop with small orders relating to their personal weapons or uniform.



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Messrs. John Wilkes. 30th. April, 1942

Order No.					
Apr. 1.	11	Six (Royal) leather holsters, straps & swivels, for 32 Colt Auto Pistols.		3	6 -
			Pur.Tax	1	2 -
Apr. 2.	Phone.	Fifteen leather holsters with pkt. for 45 Colt Auto pistols.		6	5 -
			Pur.Tax	2	1 8
Apr. 7.	V.	Fitting swivels from one holster to another as instructions.			2 -
Apr. 13.	Phone.	Thirtyfive leather holsters with pkt.for 45 Colt Auto pistols.		14	11 8
			Pur.Tax.	4	17 3
Apr. 17.	24.	Shldr. tols Twelve lea. (Mexican) holsters for 45 Colt Auto Pis-		5	11 -
			Pur.Tax	1	17 -
Apr.		Twelve lea.(Mexican) Shldr.holsters for 32 Colt auto. pistols.		4	16 -
			Pur.Tax	1	12 -
Apr. 23.	26.	Fitting tablet to Dble. O/L case & stmpg. J.F.Carter Braine.			11 6
Apr. 29.	Phone.	Leather holster for a 7½" W.S.target revr.			12 6
		Leather orige. pouch, loop for S/B belt.			3 9
			Pur.Tax		5 5
Apr. 30.	24	Thirtyeight leather (Mexican) shldr.holsters for 32 Colt Auto Pistols.		15	4 -
			Pur.Tax	5	1 4
				£ 68	- 1

RECEIVED 68 0 1 WITH COMPLIMENTS & CHEQUE PHILIP LEWEY & SONS. 16 JUN 1942

A Lewey invoice from 1942 for various items most of which were holsters destined for DON

DON's special holsters were quite expensive, costing £1/13/0 each, whereas the standard holsters for the same weapon, in this instance a Colt auto, cost 8/9 for the belt mounted version and 9/9 for a shoulder version. April and May 1941 saw 200 holsters of varying sizes being delivered, along with various bits and pieces of cleaning equipment and ammunition. Lt Kendal bought a number of items of uniform badges and insignia off Wilkes in June, which they had to order from a specialist supplier. By June the first tranche of pistol holster orders was complete

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and Wilkes returned to DON two samples that had been used as patterns. In July the supply of standard holsters was still continuing as was the need for oil. Two gallons of heavy lubricating oil, 100 three ounce tins and 2 one gallon tins of Rangoon oil and 25 one pound tins of Vaseline were supplied. The oils all came from a specialist supplier Challenge Oils who may have had cause to wonder what Wilkes were doing with it.

Pistols

In early August the war effort somehow required DON to order a double rise clay pigeon trap and 1000 clay pigeons costing £12/0/0 along with 1000 rounds of 12 bore ammunition and another 100 holsters. After a lull in August, there were more holster and 12 bore ammunition orders in September, but then in October a new type of work started to arrive from DON. In that month Wilkes received, 6 automatic pistols for cleaning and overhaul including the making and fitting of new grips to some of them – these were a Webley, a Colt and four Walthers. Along with these was a mixed batch of 43 automatic pistols, which were stripped cleaned, polished and re-blacked for £1 each. DON also hired the services of T.M.Wilkes for 5 days from 27th to 30th Oct for £10, plus £2/16/0 for his hotel expenses, during which he overhauled and greased 208 Colt and Luger automatic pistols. Tomlinson concludes a letter in November 1941 detailing a consignment of pistols for overhaul as follows: -

> *"All the above require servicing, cleaning and heavily greasing so that they can be stored with a minimum risk of rusting. So far as I know, none of them require repairs, but should you find any that seem to want "looking to", please put them on one side and let me know."*

Many years later John remembered the box after box of pistols that came in for overhaul from DON over the coming years. For agents behind the lines it was important that they were not given any arms that would be out of place in whichever country they were sent to, so DON was scouring world markets to buy up weapons of foreign manufacture. It was these that were coming in from the autumn of 1941 onwards. Some of them were in quite poor condition. John remembered Uncle Tom picking one from a newly delivered box and cocking and firing it. It made an unusual sound, not the sound of the hammer falling on an empty chamber. When cocked again a live round was ejected, the pistol had only failed to go off because the firing pin was gummed solid with oxidised oil. In the confines of the back shop at 79 Beak Street it is unlikely that the bullet would have missed everyone present. Thereafter whenever a new box of pistols arrived, the first step was to check that none of them were loaded.

DON wanted the pistols sent to Wilkes to be returned quickly, and John who would then have been 17, remembered that some nights he worked until 2 o'clock in the morning to get the jobs completed in time so that they could go out the next morning. Making his way through Golden Square on the way to get a night bus at Piccadilly Circus he found the square floodlit to allow excavations to proceed at night. A new air raid shelter was being built there and whilst doing so the excavations had hit a burial pit from the plague of 1665, which had killed 100,000 Londoners. It was felt that it would be unacceptable to clear the bones during the day when the Square would have been crowded, so the work was done in the dead if night when only people like John were there to watch.

In November 1941 a batch of 76 revolvers came in that were stripped cleaned and greased for 3/0 each and 11 more automatics at £1. Uncle Tom paid another week-long visit and this time stripped and cleaned 240 Luger pistols. There is one clue on these visits where Tom charges the customer for a return ticket to St Albans, the only reference in the ledgers as to where this activity

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was based. The pressure for quick turnaround is evidenced in a letter from Tomlinson less than a week after the one cited above, this one accompanying a batch of 38 automatics and 6 revolvers: -

> *"It is difficult to estimate exactly how many weapons I shall be sending you in the near future, but there may be many batches about the size of the present one. For this reason I would like you to hurry the batch forward all possible (sic) so that we avoid congestion in your establishment."*

One of John's favourite stories comes from this time when the trade was awash with pistols in various states of repair. The young John answered the door one day to find Frank Banister standing outside carrying a 250-sized cardboard cartridge box. Banister, then in his early sixties, was a god-like figure in the trade to the young Wilkes brothers. He was Woodward's actioner. Having worked on their U&O gun most of his working life, he was one of the most gifted men in the trade. He was good friends with Jack and had come round to ask for a little bit of help, not the kind of request that Banister often had to make. In the box were the parts of a Webley automatic pistol, which he had been told by Mr Woodward to assemble. John, quite bemused that such legendary figure didn't know how to do this, took the box and completed the task in very short order in front of him, handing it back fully assembled to a still confused looking Banister.

Frank Banister and John Ross

For many years I heard stories from John and Tom about Woodward's actioner Banister who was a good friend of their father's and who was known to both brothers in their early years in business. Much later on, when trying to trace Mr Banister, I asked John if he knew his first name. John replied that as far as he knew he didn't have one – everyone referred to him as Banister, so the search began with a useful bit of information missing.

Frank Henry Banister was born in 1880, one of ten children of Thomas and Hannah Banister living in Willesden in northwest London. Grandfather had been a farmer in nearby Kilburn which in the mid 19th century would have been on the perimeter of London's sprawl. He sold his land for development and there is now a short length of main road in Kilburn called Banister Road. None of the family seems to have had any connection with the gun trade but by 1901 Frank, still living in his family home is describing himself as a gunmaker, and ten years later, newly married to Elizabeth, 4 years his senior, he is a Gun Action Filer, and living at 14 Station Road, Kensal Rise also in the same area of London.

In 1903 Banister, then 23 years old, and John Ross jointly patented a single trigger mechanism from a factory address in Kew, West London[13]. It is possible that Banister had been apprenticed to Ross, an actioner and a prolific inventor, who came from the borders in Cumberland where he was born in 1847. Ross had a son George born in London in 1877. Ross's career seems to have alternated between employment and outworking. For a while in the 1870s and 1880s, Ross seems to have worked in Glasgow, but by 1890, when he registered his first patent he was living in Battersea in south London and by 1894 Dallas[15] reports Ross father and son working as actioners for Holland & Holland, the son who was then only 17 possibly apprenticed to his father. John Ross registered no fewer than 10 patents between 1890 and 1914. We know that by 1898 Ross had his own gunmaking business at Wells Mews, north of Oxford Street, which was equipped with machinery valued at £223. This business was purchased by Lang & Hussey in 1898 along with all its equipment and the services of its men, possibly including Banister and certainly including Ross himself. When Hussey left the firm under a cloud almost immediately thereafter he tried to take all his men with him, but it looks probable, given the address of the 1903 patent, that Ross soon after became self-employed again. By 1911, his census return shows him work at home in West London, his trade label at the time bearing the address 18 St John's Grove, Richmond, and describing him as a "Gun Maker and Inventor". By 1914 Ross, then in his late sixties, was co-patentee with Hussey father and son of two designs related to U&O

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guns, but in the same year he was back on Holland's payroll, where George had been since 1908. Both, according to Dallas were still there in 1920. John and Tom used to refer to Ross, who had the nickname of "Five Fingered Jack", as an actioner of legendary ability, although given the propensity of sons to be known by the same name as their fathers, there must be some doubt if this nickname was used for John or his son George. Certainly some of the more unusual guns to come through Wilkes workshop had Ross's mark on their actions, and occasionally guns appear in auction that bear his name.

Returning to Banister, the Wilkes brothers believed that he worked for Woodward for most of his working life. When Woodward closed his business in the late 1940's, Banister handed over a set of cutters that he had made for machining the early Woodward OU actions on a lathe that had been converted to run as a horizontal milling machine. This would place Banister with Woodward well before 1913, the date of the first U&O patent. Banister would have been doing, in all probability, the hard work of roughing out the prototype actions whilst Hill, Evershed, the factory manager and Woodward concentrated on perfecting the design and registering the patents in their three names. Banister would have been with Woodward whilst they produced some of their most iconic guns between the wars and by the late 1930s was the only actioner still with Woodward.

Frank Banister was very much brought up in the old school of gunmaking. John remembered visiting Woodward's workshop to find him just about to make up a ¼" end cutter. John asked why he would make such a thing when standard size cutters like that were freely available to buy at shops like Buck & Ryan. Banister had no idea that you could buy cutters – he had been brought up always to make his own. After some reflection he decided to carry on with making his own as Mr Woodward would never agree to pay for something that Banister could make for himself. On another occasion Jack was visiting the workshop and had taken the young Tom along with him. Banister was in the process of the final assembly of the triggerplate of a new gun. He was about to temper the trigger spring pin, arguably the smallest part in the gun. Jack knew what was coming and whispered to Tom to watch this. With that, Banister took up an enormous pair of blacksmith's tongs, into the jaws of which he had filed a tiny notch. The pin was fitted into this notch and held there whilst he brought it to the blue temper in an equally enormous flame.

Men with skills like his were treated with an almost religious reverence by others in the trade; Bob Henderson at Boss was similarly worshipped. Despite his status and the fact the Woodward's entire business, such as it was towards the end of the thirties, depended on him and him alone, Banister told stories of being relentlessly bullied by Mr Woodward.

When Woodward sold his business to Purdey in the late 1940s, the aspect of it that Purdey's most wanted from the purchase was the right to make the Woodward U&O action under their own name. To help with this they were expecting to get the services of Frank Banister, who although in his late 60s at the time, would have been able to train up Purdey's actioners to take on the task. Around the time that the sale was going through Banister came to the Beak Street shop to talk over the impending move with Jack Wilkes. After working a lifetime in small workshops, the prospect of moving to a large factory was not appealing to him – he really didn't want to work for Purdey's. The "Sun and 13 Cantons" is a pub on the corner of Great Pulteney Street and Beak Street, barely 30 yards from Wilkes' shop. The two men went there for a drink to drown Banister's sorrows at his impending move. On coming out of the pub, and turning to walk down Great Pulteney Street, Banister tripped and fell on a kerb supporting an iron railing that protrudes into the pavement to protect the basement opening of the next door

The kerb on which Frank Banister is believed to have tripped.

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property. The kerb is still there today. He sustained serious head injuries in the fall.

John and Tom, both off whom would have been away on Military Service at the time, believed that Banister had died as a result of these injuries, and I looked in vain for a record of his death around this time. Whilst it seems likely that the injuries he sustained were serious enough to mean that he could never work again, he lived almost another twenty years until early 1966, when he died at Hillingdon in outer west London aged 85.

Capt. E.J. Rowat

With an invoice submitted to DON on 5th January 1942, there was a new addressee, Capt E.J.Rowat. Lt Col Tomlinson was posted shortly thereafter to Ascension Island where, as Governor, he worked with the Americans to build a runway on the island. In June 1942 an invoice is on the books to his personal account for oiling for storage two guns, a rifle, three pistols and a revolver in packing cases. Wilkes moved a total of £14/5/6 of business to this account from the DON account, a sum that was eventually written off unpaid.

Whilst much of the business placed with Wilkes in the preceding eighteen months was quite clearly to support the war effort, some of it, particularly that relating to guns and shooting, raises questions about what purpose it served. It could well have been that SOE were making legitimate military use of it all. We just don't know what that use was. Boyce and Everett point out that these acquisitions of civilian weapons were known in the War Office as BDPs, for Back Door Purchases. The orders continued and indeed increased suggesting that there was indeed a military use for it all. With Rowat's arrival there was more attention to providing reference numbers for orders, although a minority of invoices are still marked "verbal", and the submitting and paying of invoices, after a rather haphazard start, was by then being done on a monthly basis, payment usually being made by cheque about two months after the invoice date. The order reference numbers began with a set of initials, apparently those of the originator of the order in the War Office. Initially there are, along with the initials of Tomlinson and Rowat, those of Lt J. Kendal, Rowat's eventual successor as principal on the DON account and LJP, the initials of Lt L.J.Paton.

Capt. Rowat went on buying some shooting related supplies; for instance ordering almost a quarter of a ton of size 5 lead shot in January 1942, along with 12 gallons of Rangoon oil and another 12 gallons in March. This same month he ordered 2500 12 and 16 bore cartridges followed by another 3000 12 bore cartridges loaded with no 2 shot in April 1942, the latter ordered along with six wooden boxes in which to ship them. Cartridges at this point, 30 months into the war, were twice their pre-war price. Alongside these orders were continuing bulk orders for holsters and pistol overhauls.

Just in case the team at Wilkes were wondering what to do next, the Central Ordnance Depot at Greenford in West London in April sent in 7000 rifle parts, magazines, butt plates and the like, for repair and re-black at around sixpence each, and 368 stocks for repair and refinishing at 3/2 each, the total bill for this work coming to £212.

Secret Weapon

When recounting stories about their war work, John would usually focus on one particular aspect; the work that Wilkes did on developing concealed pistols and the means to fire them by remote control. This work started in February 1942. DON had developed in their research department a mechanism for firing an automatic pistol strapped to an agent's body by means of a Bowden cable that ran down the arm inside the sleeve, the idea being that it would be possible to get a shot at an enemy whilst the hands were apparently raised in surrender. Wilkes were commissioned to

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manufacture these harnesses and triggers, a procedure that required them to make up jigs and other specialist tooling.

Such a mechanism requires that the pistol harness is securely fixed such that its wearer has some idea of where the bullet is likely to go, and that the remote trigger is sufficiently positive to allow the firer to control exactly if and when the weapon fires. The mechanism developed by DON seemed to Wilkes to be deficient on the second count and they set about redesigning it with an improved trigger mechanism.

A letter of 6th March 1942 from Lt Kendal reads: -
"Further to our conversation the other day, we now hand you 11 .32 Colt automatic pistols together with eleven webbing belts for your requirements for the remote control pistols."

Initially DON provided Wilkes with a pattern along with the above components, and in February and March 1942 they supplied DON with 5 copies of this at £8/18/6 each to fit the Colt pistols. But also in March Wilkes provided one sample of their own improved version for £13/18/0, in both instances the invoices pointing out that the cost includes a proportion of the cost of the jigs and tooling. In all Wilkes were to supply 17 sets of which twelve were to their design, the last being supplied on 22nd May, at which point DON's initial patterns were also returned. There was never much in the way of feedback as to how these units had performed in the field; John remembered hearing that one of them may have been used in anger on one occasion. John also remembered working on pistols concealed in briefcases, which is work that may have been done as a pilot but never achieved the scale to appear in invoices.

For many years the paperwork, including drawings, of the remote control harness were kept in the shop, but shortly before it closed they were borrowed by someone undertaking research into SOE's weapons on behalf of the Imperial War Museum and never returned.

Another clandestine weapon in which Wilkes played a part in its development was the de Lisle carbine, a weapon intended for single shot sniping in silent conditions. Both Tom and John would recount stories of assembling these during their time in the shop in the war years. The carbine was a silenced .45 ACP weapon that used a shortened Thompson machine gun barrel and an SMLE bolt. It was fitted with a very effective silencer that ran the full length of the barrel. It had been designed in 1942 for use by commandos by W.G de Lisle, who was an occasional customer of Wilkes during the war, and indeed Wilkes were also a customer of his. They bought twelve trigger assemblies, for £2 each from him in July 1942, but the work they did for him was small and not obviously related to the carbine. Here the trail of what Wilkes actually did on the carbine goes cold as there is no invoice in the ledgers that relates to Wilkes working on de Lisle carbines. It may have been that secrecy dictated this, but we are left only with the reminiscences of the two brothers to substantiate the firm's involvement with this weapon.

War Work – the Last 3 Years

After this special work finished there was still some £4,000 of business with DON in the final three years of the war. Holsters continued to make up a good proportion of this into 1943 and declining thereafter. After Kendal took over from Rowat the bulk of the business was made up of work on pistols – in all over 3000 of them came through the shop in the last three years of war. There were no further excursions by Uncle Tom to do this work on site, but there was steady stream of work making new grips and firing pins, hundreds of these in all, and a large number of revolvers had their barrels shortened and sights regulated to compensate.

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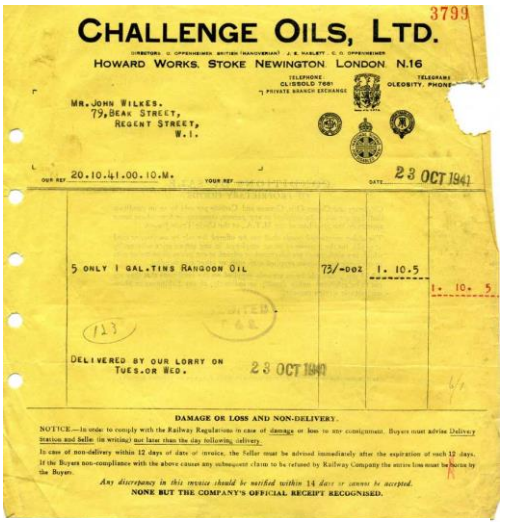
Many revolvers came in with a nickel plated finish and DON wanted this removed and replaced with a blued finish. This led to a technical disagreement. Wilkes pointed out that removing the plating and replacing it with a blue finish would mean that the cylinders would end up slightly under size. Despite raising this they were instructed to carry on with the work, charging a £1/6/0 per weapon for this. The resulting revolvers often then had problems caused by a slight misalignment of the cylinder with the barrel.

Whilst Wilkes were sometimes overwhelmed by the volumes of handguns coming in from DON to their small shop, Boyce and Everett give some overall data that puts this in perspective. DON were sending out to agents at peak some 3-5,000 hand guns per month, meaning that Wilkes probably handled somewhere between 5 and 10% of their total supply during the years from 1941 to 1945. There must have been many others involved in similar kinds of work.

This volume also explains what DON were doing with all the Vaseline and Rangoon oil – in all DON took some 400 lbs of Vaseline and 150 gallons of Rangoon from Wilkes alone during the war. This was used to pack weapons for shipment in situations where they may well have been exposed to harsh conditions, but it can't have been much fun removing it all in the field before putting the weapons to use. A few of the weapons DON sent round for refurbishment were found to be only fit for breaking up for spares. When the handgun ban came into force more than fifty years later, Wilkes had to clear out box after box of pistol spare parts, accumulated from this period.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MR. JOHN WILKES.
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REGENT STREET,
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OUR REF. 20.10.41.00.10.M. YOUR REF. DATE 23 OCT 1941

5 ONLY 1 GAL. TINS RANGOON OIL 73/-DOZ 1. 10. 5

1. 10. 5

DELIVERED BY OUR LORRY ON TUES. OR WED. 23 OCT 1941

DAMAGE OR LOSS AND NON-DELIVERY.

NOTICE—In order to comply with the Railway Regulations in case of damage or loss to any consignment, Buyers must advise Delivery Station and Sells (in writing) not later than the day following delivery.

In case of non-delivery within 12 days of date of invoice, the Seller must be advised immediately after the expiration of such 12 days. If the Buyers non-compliance with the above causes any subsequent claim to be refused by Railway Company the entire loss must be borne by the Buyer.

Any discrepancy in this invoice should be notified within 14 days or cannot be accepted.

NONE BUT THE COMPANY'S OFFICIAL RECEIPT RECOGNISED.

Invoice from 1941 for five 1 gallon tins of Rangoon for DON.

Henry Atkin Ltd continued to send work on Lewis guns parts, mainly stocks and grips, for the remainder of the war, although it never achieved again the volumes of 1940. Unit prices were the same in 1944 as they had been at the outset, and total turnover in the war was about £1650, the work winding down to almost nothing during 1944. Bearing in mind the average unit cost of these jobs was around two shillings; this represents about 15,000 parts being refurbished in the course of five years.

Gun Work for the Trade

As many of the gunmaking firms found their workshops largely swamped with war work, they started making other arrangements to get gun repairs undertaken. The ever reliable Vaughan, although no longer functioning as an outlet for new Wilkes guns, continued to send a steady stream of mainly shotgun repair and refurbishment jobs to Wilkes, his business averaging £300 per year throughout the war. John remembered an incident between his father and Mr Vaughan, which related to a Purdey gun, No 19940, which in May 1942 had been sent round to Wilkes for a full refurbishment – strip and clean, lapping and re-blacking the barrels and the steel work, refinishing and re-chequering the stock and fore-end. A total of £3/5/0 was invoiced for this, but the invoice is marked "Hole in joint side of right barrel". John remembered a heated discussion between the two in the shop, Vaughan believing that the mark was an un-removed pit and Jack that it was a hole rusting through from the outside under the ribs. In the event the disagreement was resolved by Jack offering to remove the ribs, and replace them free of charge if it was indeed

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a pit. Jack was right, it was a hole, and Vaughan took the gun away, presumably to contemplate getting it re-barrelled.

Other trade work included a few small jobs from Purdey, a sudden and brief flurry of barrel repairs from Grant & Lang, a few small jobs from Woodward, and surge of work from Holland & Holland totalling about £200 between 1942 and 1944, and a reappearance of work from Army & Navy stores in 1944/5; but it was the trade work that came from W.J. Jeffery that was to have long term significance.

Jeffery's shop in Golden Square was barely 2 minutes' walk away from Beak Street. In the 1920s Wilkes had acted as go between to get guns and rifles made up for them, but this work had dwindled, presumably because Jeffery were dealing direct with makers like Charles Leonard in Birmingham in the 1930s. Although they had used Wilkes throughout that decade, it was only ever on an occasional basis. In 1941 the work started to ramp up reaching £500 a year by the end of the war. Unlike some of the other work undertaken during the war which disappeared when the war ended, the work that Wilkes was to do for Jeffery was destined to get bigger, making Jeffery by far their largest post war trade customer. There is no change of role behind this rise in Jeffery's work, they were just sending more and more repair and alteration work around to Wilkes. The majority of the work was on guns, fewer than half of them of their own make. The jobs are individually small, only rarely amounting to more than £2 per gun; it is the increasing volume of this work that makes Jeffery's position amongst Wilkes trade customers become so significant.

Wartime Retail Business

Throughout the war, Wilkes continued to meet the needs of retail customers, but unlike the opening year or two when this business continued unabated for a while, it was to settle down to much more subdued levels. Old customers for guns continued to come in for servicing and repairs and bought ammunition, but not on the scale in which they had pre-war. Some new retail customers, many with military ranks, appeared with work either supplying or servicing side arms, and sometimes rifles, but retail business was muted. The graphs in Appendix 3B mask this trend because work from customers like DON are included in the retail category. If all the Government funded work was excluded the residual retail turnover during the war years would have been very thin.

Wartime Suppliers

Apart from suppliers who were supporting the work for DON, notably Lewey and Challenge Oils, there was a small stream of supplies coming in to support gun business. Harper supplied just one gun in the later war years, a .410 A&D ejector in 1943, which was sold to Jeffery. Unlike the repairs conducted in the 1930s, where often work that came in was sent straight to Birmingham to be done, the equivalent work during the war was handled mostly in house, with the external help of the London based barrel filers Harry Wheeler and Bill Wakefield, and of the stocker Dickie Bolter. Wakefield made up a pair of Vickers steel barrels for £8. Jack was buying stock blanks where he could get them, Holland & Holland and Boss providing a few. There was still engraving work for Kell, mostly in support of the repairs and refurbishment business. But the most striking aspect of the orders placed with suppliers during the major part of the war is that the dependence on the Birmingham trade, which had been such a core part Wilkes' business in the first 45 years of its existence, had all but disappeared.

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The Apprentices

Jack's two sons, John and Tom both joined the firm's payroll during the war. John first appears on reaching the age of 16 in mid-1940 and was a paid employee in the shop until after the end of the war. His wages started at £1/10/0 rising to £3/10/0 by the end of the war and to £5 by mid-1946. In Tom's case, he does not actually appear on payroll until reaching the age of 19 in late 1944, when he starts on £3/0/0 per week. I suspect he was working earlier than this, probably from the age 16 in late 1941 for pocket money. By the end of the war a lot of bureaucracy had been put in place around employment and it may have been that this was circumvented by Tom serving his apprenticeship for cash payments.

Tom remembered his father as a hard taskmaster, giving guidance only when needed or requested, and throwing his sons in at the deep end. Both seem to have begun by undertaking stocking jobs. Tom recalled having started to let in the strap on his first stocking job. In those days the chisels used were thin all-steel tools. Jack, working at the next bench, told Tom without looking up that he was hitting the chisel too hard and that the stock would split if he persisted. Tom heard the message, and moderated his hammering, but a few moments later had reverted to hitting the chisel as hard as before. When the stock duly split, and Tom had to trudge off to get a new blank for a second attempt, Jack said very little. I can remember Tom looking at an early Rogers action best gun made by Grant, reminiscing that a similar one was his first sidelock re-stocker. Grant guns of that vintage, which were actioned by Robertson, had large, square and entirely flat action backs – meaning that the stock head was equally flat and square. Tom recalled that it was only because of this large bearing area that he got away without his first stock being loose on the action. Another early experience was having his father crush in the vice a fore-end iron on which he had just cut out the slot for the loop. It was wide on the sides and would have worked loose. Such dramatic demonstrations that work was not up to scratch seem to have been part of Jack's teaching method.

John remembered his father picking up a gun in the front shop early in his time at work, handing it to him with the advice to take a good look at it because he would never see a better made gun. That was all the instruction that Jack gave - to look at the gun. What more John learnt from doing so was up to him. The gun in question was a Woodward, a sidelock ejector from the 1880s, built on the underlever cocking action that was patented by Southgate in 1876 and used by Woodward on their guns for about a decade. This example had been little used in its first 60 years of life and still had the crispness of being newly made, even though it was one of the first generation of hammerless guns. John remembered it as being light at just over six pounds, beautifully balanced and superbly finished inside and out, and with an unusual smoothness of operation.

This teaching method worked on John. In later years he would often pick up ostensibly unremarkable objects, like a cutter, a spring, a reamer or a lock bridle and remark on how beautifully they were made. John's assessments were always made with a deep knowledge of the tools and workshop facilities available to the men that made the objects in question. It was an appreciation that had been drummed into him from his earliest days in the shop, and one that in these days of ever more capable machine tools, future generations may find harder and harder to share. There was an extraordinary volume and variety of work coming into the business in the few years after the two boys started at the shop. They would have been immersed in an enormous range of different jobs, and had to work under high pressure. It would have been a baptism of fire, one that would pay off in later years.

In the second half of 1945 Tom Wilkes, who was then approaching 20 years old, was conscripted for military service. John followed the same route a year later when he was 22. Both were to be

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away from the business until 1948, Tom returning early in that year and John about six months later.

Their approaches to military service were quite different, Tom forever challenging military discipline and moving from one act of insubordination to the next, John conforming to all that was expected of him, and keeping out of trouble until he was released back into civilian life. John was fortunate in that his entire service was as an armourer at various sites in the UK. His six years in the shop prior to call-up gave him experience in this branch of the service way beyond his age and rank which led to a few incidents, such as an occasion on which he condemned a large batch of rifles as unfit for further use, a verdict that was inconsistent with the plans his superiors had for them. Tom had a more challenging posting to the Far East in the immediate aftermath of the war with Japan, which brought with it some fairly harrowing experiences.

Having John and Tom off payroll for almost 3 years was probably a benefit to the business. Turnover and profit, whilst fluctuating quite a lot from year to year, were roughly at the same levels in "money of the day" terms as they had been in the 1930s, but prices had almost doubled in the decade from 1938 and wages had risen a little more than that. The same thing had happened in the 1914 war, but whereas at the end of that conflict prices had gradually moved back to close to their pre-war levels, after the second war they were to go on rising. So the post-war period was one when the business would have been under financial strain and nowhere near as prosperous as it had been pre-war.

Aftermath

The surrender of Germany in May and Japan in August 1945 brought war work to an abrupt end. Some of it, like the work for Atkin on Lewis guns ramped down gradually although small amounts were still coming in early in 1945. The work for DON had a more abrupt decline. As late as March 1945, Major Kendal took delivery of 112lbs of green Vaseline, and pistol refurbishments continued in some volume to the middle of that year.

SOE's days were numbered however; the organisation was to close down completely by the end of 1945. As soon as the war ended, they and other Government agencies started to unload rather quickly the *materiel* they had been busy accumulating in the previous six years. In September 1945 Wilkes bought from the Inter Services Research Bureau at 64 Baker St a large batch of about 200 guns and rifles for £1900, many of which they had supplied to DON in the preceding five years. A copy of the inventory of this sale survives and is shown in Appendix 9. It is now public knowledge that this address was that of the headquarters of SOE and that the ISRB was the cover name of their clandestine weapons development organisation, so it is at this point after the war that the ledgers finally identify what DON was. Included in the batch were the guns and sporting rifles that Wilkes had sold to DON, so whatever they were used for, they were held on the Governments asset register. Amongst them were the boxed double 8 bore and 4 bore guns that had been one of Col Tomlinson's first purchases. Most of the ISRB weapons were sold on quickly to Jeffery for about £2130. Another batch of weapons from this and other sources along with a large mixed lot of ammunition went to LePersonne for £578. These two rather large transactions totalling £2700 make the turnover of just over £6000 for the 1945/6 financial year look rather healthier than the underlying business would justify.

Peacetime Gunmaking

Whilst the First World War had set the gun trade back, it had, after twenty years of peacetime trading, regained some of its prosperity, albeit at lower levels of business. The Second World War

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was to have an altogether more far reaching impact, one that would require another change in the focus of Wilkes' business.

Wilkes had devoted the 1930s to growing retail business, particularly the sale of new guns. Their retail customer numbers during the war years and immediately after fell but only to about 70-80% of pre-war levels. Numbers during the war were boosted a bit by services personnel with work of a military nature, but some of these customers returned in peacetime with sporting firearms. The numbers of customers seeking to buy new guns after the war dwindled to a mere trickle; the register shows a total of four 12 bore boxlocks, two of them recorded as "Best", finished during the 1940s. The post war retail work was supplies, repairs and alterations, with the occasional buying and selling of used guns and rifles.

Even if demand had been there, the impact of the war on the ability of the gun trade to make new firearms had been far more significant in this war than the previous one. In part this was due to damage to infrastructure caused by bombing, but the biggest impact was in the economy and the availability of skilled people to work in the trade.

We have focussed on the Jack Wilkes' contemporaries, the group born in the period between 1870 and 1890, the youngest of whom were nearing 60 in the immediately post war period. These men had little else to do but to return to the trade, but as this generation left the workforce, and despite some of them carrying on at the bench into grand old age, the trade would then depend on the generation that followed for its continuity.

This generation of craftsmen, in their 30s and 40s after the war, who were skilled gunmakers at its start, would have been employed in the engineering industries during the war, and some would have seen far more attractive opportunities outside the gun trade as the country tried to re-build its manufacturing base in the years immediately after. This was a period of austerity for Great Britain as the post war government sought to introduce major social changes at home and geopolitical changes occurred in the former Empire. It was a time of near national bankruptcy; the rationing of certain foodstuffs didn't end until 1954. The war brought about the beginnings of significant social change that was to lead to skilled manual workers expecting more pay relative to the average, a trend to which the gun trade was ill-prepared to adapt.

The trade also had difficulty attracting trainees. Like certain other craft industries, gunmaking was locked into a Victorian model of training and remunerating its workforce. Master Gunmakers had always enjoyed a level of remuneration that was at the top end of the artisan trades, but the training regime to get to this level was strict and remuneration in the early stages almost non-existent. Masters' book[23] on Atkin, Grant and Lang details the terms of some post-war apprenticeship contracts. These must have looked very unattractive to young men returning from combat or fresh out of school, seeking a career in post war Britain.

The Birmingham trade, for so long the engine room of British gunmaking never recovered from the impact of the war. Only a few of the firms that had made guns in the 1930s, either for the trade of for sale under their own name, resumed production after the war, and of those that did some, like Bayliss, survived in business for only a few years. The component manufacturers, furniture makers, snap makers, spring makers and the like seem to have been particularly hard hit. Barrel tubes were almost unobtainable for a period after the war. These businesses required volume and raw materials to survive, and without these, those involved found other more remunerative ways of using their skills.

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The war caused an exodus of skilled men from the trade, it increased the difficulty of attracting new apprentices, it dried up many of the supplies, and it left both domestic and overseas markets in disarray. It is hardly surprising that the gun trade was going to have a difficult time after the war.

As an aside that is relevant to this point, John recalled taking a gold half hunter pocket watch to a watchmaker on St Martin's Lane for repair immediately after the war. John would have been in his early twenties, the watchmaker that served him was well into his seventies, so was one of Jack's generation. John noticed that the shopkeeper was not very interested in taking on the repair, and asked why that was. The old man reached behind him and pulled down a box on to the counter that contained a mass of partially completed pocket watch components, balance wheels, cogs and so forth. As he did so he said "I'll tell you why I am not that interested. I had to make those (pointing at the watch) out of these (pointing into the box) for four pence halfpenny an hour." At this rate the apprentice watchmaker around 1890 would have had to put in a 72 hour week to earn about £1/7/0 a week, about the same as the lowest paid men in Purdey's workshop. The situation in the gun trade was little better. Henry Morris, the Birmingham engraver, described to Hinchley[20] how he had held out for ninepence an hour when offered a job around 1900 by Westley Richards. They refused to pay such an absurdly high rate and so they did not secure the services of one of the most gifted engravers of his generation.

Back to Trade Work

Wilkes' response was to focus on trade work again. With his two sons returning to work in 1948, by then both fully trained gunmakers, Jack Wilkes would soon have a fully manned gunmaking workshop in London, undamaged by the war. His fellow London gunmakers, many of whom had lost staff or had their premises damaged, were still getting retail customers through the doors in some numbers. Pre-war, the Birmingham trade had provided a backstop for London trade work, anything that couldn't be handled in London was sent to the likes of Harper and Bayliss and many others. With the capacity of Birmingham now much reduced, Jack set about building Wilkes's business so that 79 Beak Street would be a workshop to the London trade, in particular to those members of it that had either insufficient capacity or no capacity at all to undertake work in the capital. When interviewed in 1949 [20], a provincial gun shop owner on the south coast said that "all London gun shops sent their repairs to a Mr Wilkes in London, if not to Birmingham". Whilst this may have been something of an over simplification, this certainly reflects the role that Jack was aiming to fill and which was to set the scene for Wilkes' business for the next twenty years. But before this could happen there was an important change to be made to the building.

James Woodward & Sons

The London gun trade suffered one major casualty in the immediate post war years. James Woodward & Sons, still regarded as one of the top flight London makers of all time, had been in decline for over ten years by the time the business was sold to Purdey in January 1949. They had made fewer than 60 guns in their last decade, compared with 90 a year at their peak at the end of the 19th century. Despite their U&O gun being one of the most sought after products of the London trade, their business was destined for closure, partly because their proprietor, Charles Woodward, who was 70 at the time of the sale, lacked both the temperament to take on a partner and any close family members to succeed to the business, and partly because he was such an overbearing employer that none of his staff returned after the war. John recalled visiting Woodward's last workshop in Ham Yard, barely three minutes' walk away from Beak Street. The barrel filer George Lane had one half of the shop and Woodward the other, and after the war there was only Frank Banister left at work in Woodward's end of the shop. As the business ran down, Woodward had been sending a small but steady stream of minor jobs up to Wilkes, mostly stock alterations and refurbishments and barrel repairs. As late as 1949, Wilkes oil finished the stocks

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of two newly made U&O guns, the last invoice being on 14th June of that year, six months after the sale of the business to Purdey. Wilkes charged £1/0/0 for oiling the stock of gun 7183, the penultimate gun made by the firm.

Charles Woodward

For the members of the trade about whom the Wilkes brothers had stories to tell, there were common themes of either affection for the individuals or admiration for their professionalism and craftsmanship, and in many cases both. There was one exception. Charles Littleton Woodward, or "Old Man Woodward" as he was usually referred to, was someone they neither liked nor admired. The James Woodward after whom the firm was named and who had been in partnership with Charles Moore since the 1840s, had two sons, James and Charles, born in 1839 and 1844 respectively. The firm became James Woodward and Sons in the early 1870s, by which time Charles Moore had already left the business. During the last forty years of the 19th century, Woodward established a reputation for building high quality and elegant guns, albeit in relatively low numbers. Charles Woodward died in 1895 and his elder brother in 1900, leaving the firm in a partnership between Charles' son, Charles L. Woodward, and William P Evershed, the manager who had worked for the Woodward brothers, and who was then in his early 30s. Charles L Woodward was only 22 years old when he became a partner in the business, and either because of lack of opportunity or lack of aptitude, was nowhere near becoming the master gunmaker that his father, uncle and grandfather had been.

The firm already had a formidable reputation when the younger Charles took over, and was to go on in the next half century to produce guns of a quality and refinement that would keep James Woodward & Sons at the very pinnacle of the trade. The design of their side-by-side guns would continue to evolve to keep them thoroughly up to date, but it was to be the introduction of the Under and Over gun that would seal the firm's reputation as one of London's finest. Although a joint patentee of this action, Charles probably had very little to do with its actual design, but in marketing it he certainly deserves credit for its success. But he had other weaknesses. He started in the business at a young age and with a partner significantly more experienced than he was, not perhaps the best foundation. Whatever the reason, Charles Woodward was to turn quite quickly into a bully with a mean streak. The stories that the Wilkes brothers told about the techniques he used to force his partner, Evershed, from the business shouldn't be repeated but would certainly have landed him in court today.

Charles Woodward *ca* 1930.

The firm relied extensively on outworkers and Mr Woodward managed them by setting unreasonably high standards and insisting that they be met. George Lane would tell stories about the exactness with which Woodward demanded the shooting of gun barrels to be regulated, constantly exposing the barrel filer to the risk of being left with a pair of barrels that he had rejected. For the men he employed directly he would lay them off, so that he didn't have to pay them, for any moment of idleness between jobs – as little as fifteen minutes would result in reduced wages. Much of this was during the depressed years of the late twenties and thirties where the owners of firms were in a buyers' market as far as skilled craftsmen were concerned. Even his last actioner, Frank Banister, lived in constant fear of being fired by Woodward, which is extraordinary given that Woodward's business would probably have collapsed immediately without Banister as he was the only one, in the later years, who could make the U&O.

Woodward normally fitted exceptionally well figured wood to their guns and maintaining a sufficient supply of blanks of the requisite quality would have been a constant struggle. Knowing this, one of Woodward's stockers approached him to see if he would be interested in buying

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some really finely marked wood that was available at a very attractive price. When he saw it, Woodward must have known that, at the price at which it was on offer, the wood must have been stolen. Nonetheless he agreed to buy it for cash, and the supply continued now and then for quite some time. The wood had indeed been stolen, from Woodward's own store room.

A couple of years after selling the business, Charles Woodward died in January 1951 at the age of 73, leaving an estate of £40,000.

According to Dallas[16], Charles Woodward sold his business to Purdey on 1st January 1949 for £444/14/6, of which £300 was goodwill the remainder being stock-in-trade. Purdey didn't take everything from Woodward's shop and workshop. There were several items that would have been surplus to their requirement. On January 10th John Wilkes bought from James Woodward & Sons the following: -

Bend Jig	*£5/0/0*
Forge	*£3/0/0*
Anvil	*£5/0/0*
Saw Machine	*£2/0/0*
Show case	*£1/0/0*
Nest of drawers & tools	*£5/0/0*
Banjo Jig	*£3/0/0*
Various tools	*£2/0/0*
3 Lathes	*£18/0/0*
3 Vices	*£3/0/0*
Grindstone and benches	*£4/0/0*
Micrometers	*£6/0/0*
	£57/0/0

Woodward's banjo jig

Some of these items would form a key part of Wilkes workshop equipment. The bend jig was a cast iron structure with elaborate legs supporting a machined plate at table height with centre line on which the gun was placed guard up, clamped down the centre by vice at the breech and a vee block near the muzzle, allowing cast and bend measurements to be made to an accuracy of 1/16" or better. It, together with an even more elaborate jig of the same type, dominated the back upstairs workshop. The banjo jig, another solid steel structure was used for laying up barrels tubes prior to brazing to ensure they were flat and square and for measuring flats and lumps after they were joined. That also resided upstairs.

It was the lathes, saw machine and grinding wheel that were the most difficult to install. These all went in the basement. One of the lathes was a barrel boring bench, and another had been adapted by Frank Banister to serve as a horizontal milling machine. Banister gave Wilkes the cutters that he had made to go with this lathe to machine the early U&O actions. In later days Woodward had these machined for them by a specialist in the trade, but the earliest models had all been made by Banister and his colleagues in Woodward's workshop on that particular lathe. Wilkes never used Banister's cutters; they remained together in their box. But John, following Banister's lead, made up another set of cutters for machining the stocks of Mauser rifles on this same machine. These would be much used in the coming years. The sawing machine was an

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automated hacksaw and was occasionally used, and the grindstone, a large horizontal axis stone wheel that ran in a bath of water, was seldom used.

All of these machine tools from Woodward were belt driven, none had their own motive power, so apart from the enormous physical effort of manhandling these tools down the cellar steps, John also had the challenge of setting up a power train for them. For this he used the 2hp motor that had been bought ten years previously which was mounted on a platform near the cellar ceiling, and line shafting that ran round two walls of the cellar. This arrangement, when it was running, shook the entire building to its foundations. John always said that Tom took no interest in setting up the cellar workshop. It is indicative of the different temperaments of the two brothers. John would always invest time in making a tool to do a job that had to be done more than once; Tom always wanted to get on with the job in hand by the quickest possible means.

The items on the invoice were not all that Wilkes was left from Woodward's shop. Banister also gave them a box of wooden patterns for forgings. These had been used in the period between 1860 and 1910. They were made of figured walnut; its grain often obscured by layers of charcoal picked up on repeated trips to the smiths. Most are stamped or labelled as belonging to Woodward, some labels also indicating whether the smith was to use iron or steel for the forging. They would have been sent to the smith and he would have returned them with the ordered quantity of forgings, all exactly matching the shape of the pattern. The early hammer gun action patterns show how the design of these guns evolved over time, thin strips of wood being added where additional strength was found to be required or blocks added to allow the carving of fuller fences. They also show the extraordinary variety of action sizes and shapes that were needed to provide guns and rifles in different calibres. These mostly dated from the time when John's grandfather worked for Hodges when actions were cut out of the solid forgings with only hand tools.

Victorian gunmaking. Forging patterns from Woodward's shop for parts of the Automatic underlever action. Clockwise from top underlever; safety slide; and triggerplate: all alongside the finished parts from an 1883 gun.

Included in this box were patterns for most of the component parts of the Woodward and Southgate 1876 patent underlever cocking action. These show clearly the enormous amount of work involved in the making of a patent action. For added atmosphere this box also had the stamp that Woodward used to impress his trade mark for the 1876 patent on the action face, a serrated semicircle containing the words "THE AUTOMATIC" normally accompanied by the patent use number stamped in its centre. Also in the box were forging patterns for the triggerplate of the far from perfect Woodward three bladed single trigger, on whose development Purdey's future factory manager Ernest Lawrence is believed to have worked.

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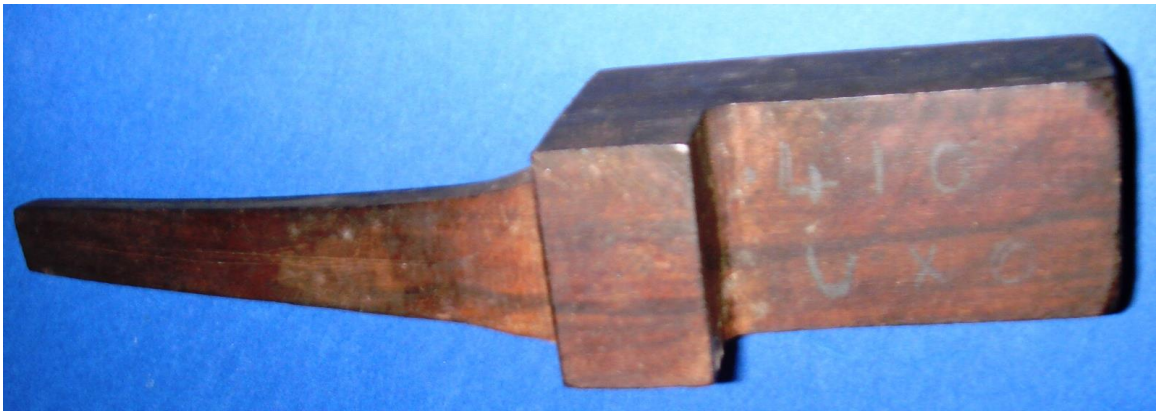
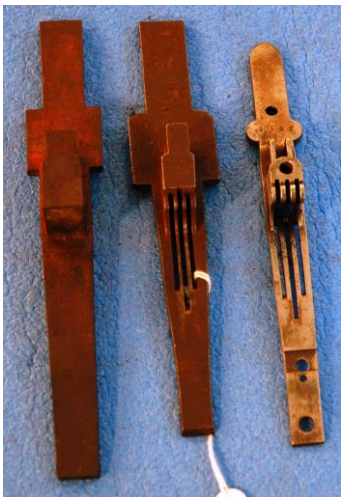


The wooden pattern for the action forging of a Woodward .410 U&O.

Finally in the box is a tantalising forging pattern, newer than the rest, marked in black pencil ".410 U&O" on one side and on the flats, and with Woodward's name on the other side, along with some pencil marks delineating the line of the fence and the cut out in the bar. Woodward only ever made one of these guns in this calibre. This is now in the Petersen Gallery of the NRA National Firearms Museum in Washington. Unlike the Boss .410 U&O, some of which had blacked steel actions, Woodward used case hardened iron for the action for this gun. This pattern could well have been used to make the forging from which the action was made.

In later years Wilkes' spares drawer contained a couple of "in the white" locks of a Woodward Automatic gun. And also in the rack of barrelled actions in Beak Street was an early Woodward side by side top lever sidelock gun with single sear locks, at the barrel and action stage. This had been kept in Woodward's shop to show customers a gun in the process of being made, indeed it was rumoured that Charles Woodward would tell them that he made it himself, a claim that gave his men cause for some amusement. It was finished as a Wilkes gun in 1976 bearing the number 9010, engraved in Woodward's early medium scroll pattern by Malcolm Appleby.



Stages in making a Woodward single trigger triggerplate; l to r: Forging pattern, machined forging, finished triggerplate.

The last gun that Woodward made ended up bearing another name. It was 20 bore side by side which was "in the white" when the business was sold. Wilkes wanted to buy it, but Woodward sold it to Charles Hellis, a decision that still rankled with John some 30 years later.

The End of the Strand Dealers

The books in the late 1940s are dominated by invoices to four trade customers Vaughan, Westley Richards, Army & Navy Stores and W.J. Jeffery. There were others as well, for example Holland & Holland sent them several stocking and rifle making jobs in both 1947 and 1948, and the latter year also marked the resumption of small amounts of work from Whistler. The colonial supplier and shipping agent F.P Baker also submitted small amounts of work, mostly cleaning and overhauling, between 1945 and 1954. Bakers, whose name is sometimes encountered on trade guns, were one of Wilkes' closest neighbours, their main shop being just off Golden Square at 2

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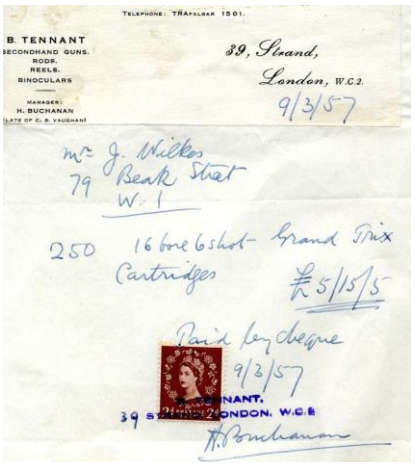
Upper James Street, with their delivery bay even nearer in Bridle Lane, one of Beak Street's lesser tributaries.

By the late 1940s, C.B.Vaughan's business was in decline, the proprietor had died and the firm had moved round the corner from their address in the Strand to Bedford Street. This was a side street leading north to form the western boundary of the area of Convent Garden, now much gentrified, but then still London's main fruit and vegetable market. Work placed with Wilkes, which by the mid-1940s was stripped of any contribution from the sale of new guns, and which had been in the range of £250 to £400 a year throughout the war, continued at around that level until 1948. From then on it declined steadily, finishing altogether in 1952. This brought to a close a business relationship that had lasted almost 60 years and which had undoubtedly benefitted both firms. Vaughan's business was bought by and eventually subsumed into that of Moss Bros, a gentleman's outfitters that specialised in hiring formal wear. They in turn were to become customers of Wilkes in the late 1960s.

Work coming to Wilkes from the dealers and the gunmakers who were working the second-hand trade tended to be made up of lots of small jobs. Even at post-war prices, it was unusual to find a job other than a restocking or re-barrelling that was charged at more than £5, the majority were around £2-£3, and quite a few were still priced only in shillings and pence. For this work to make a meaningful contribution to Wilkes turnover which was averaging around £3,000 a year required hundreds of jobs to be handled, which was indeed the case. This would have been more difficult still were it not for a few large jobs in the mix. A particularly striking example of such a job is in the invoice ledger for 1946. Vaughan sent a Purdey gun 21675 to Wilkes that required an enormous amount of work amounting to a complete re-build – we can only imagine the accident or neglect that must have befallen it.
The invoice dated 13th July 1946 reads as follows: -

> *Examining gun. Stripping ribs from barrels, removing rust marks as much as possible, fitting new top rib same as original, cleaning off and lapping barrels. Making lump and face of action as good as possible, re-jointing barrels into action. Re-proving. Smoothing and polishing action, locks etc to remove rust marks as much as possible. Repairing trigger plate, fitting new trigger guard. Fitting new pair of ejector mainsprings and new ejector slides, and regulating ejector work. Fitting new fore end tip, new safety spring and new pins and screws. Supplying stock and fore-end wood and restocking action and fore-end to original dimensions. Re-engraving, re-blacking barrels and furniture, cleaning and regulating gun.* ***£63/0/0***

Shortly after Vaughan moved out of 39 Strand, another dealer B. Tennant, advertising himself as selling second-hand guns, fishing tackle, binoculars and the like, started business at that address. Like his predecessors, Tennant also sent repair and refurbishment work to Wilkes, and a few guns were bought and sold between the two firms. By the 1950s, Tennant's letterhead was advertising the firm as being managed by Mr H. Buchanan, "formerly with C.B. Vaughan". So Tennant was clearly trying to succeed to Vaughan's business. The work he placed with Wilkes started in 1948 and ran at about £200-300 a year until 1952, whereupon it declined steadily until 1957 at which point Tennant ceased trading. Whistler had done likewise the year earlier, and with the closure of these two


B. TENNANT
SECONDHAND GUNS.
RODS.
REELS.
BINOCULARS
MANAGER:
H. BUCHANAN
LATE OF C. B. VAUGHAN
39, Strand,
London, W.C.2.
9/3/57
Mr J. Wilkes
79 Beak Street
W.1
250 16 bore 6 shot Grand Prix Cartridges £5/15/5
Paid by cheque
9/3/57
39 ... LONDON, W.C.2
H. Buchanan

An invoice from Tennant shortly before the business closed in 1957.

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firms Wilkes role in providing regular workshop facilities to the dealer trade more or less came to an end.

From the Victorian era onwards, the more up market members of the gun trade had used very elaborate stationery, a practice copied by some of the less prestigious firms in the hope, presumably, of conveying to their customers a slightly misleading impression of their status. As this stationery was used for transactions within the trade as well as with retail customers, some good examples survive in Wilkes's files. None is more imposing than Whistler's, whose invoices from 1940 had an elaborate engraved letterhead containing multiple cartouches, each advertising a separate aspect of their business, all printed in a sepia ink that gave them a distinctly *fin de siècle* air.

New Trade Customers

Work had begun to arrive from Army & Navy Stores in 1940, re-starting a business relationship that had begun with Jack's father before the start of the First World War. It stopped during the final three years of the war, resuming at its end and continuing into the mid-1950s with a peak in 1947/8 when business was around £400 per year. Brown[7] gives a good account of this firm's firearms business. With no manufacturing capability of their own they relied entirely on the trade for both the supply of new guns, many of which bore their own name, and for workshop services, like those provided by Wilkes during this period. Whilst their business was hardly game changing for Wilkes it softened the blow of the steady decline in business from the dealers in the Strand.

Westley Richards, who had occupied premises in London for a century or more, had run the London arm of their business for many years as an agency, at arm's length from the Birmingham factory. Although there had been occasional contacts with Wilkes over the years, the total volume of business in the twenty years to 1948 was probably no more than £20. When Malcolm Lyell joined Westley Richards in that year as the manger of their showroom at 23 Conduit St, there began a steady flow of jobs to John Wilkes. It was the beginning of a relationship between Wilkes and Lyell that would follow him to Jeffery and then to Holland & Holland over the next 40 years. This early work from Westley Richards in the late 1940s was cleaning and overhaul, repair, alteration and refurbishment jobs.

W.J. Jeffery

The most significant contributor to keeping Wilkes post-war workshop busy was W.J. Jeffery. We have already described the ramp up of their work flowing into Wilkes during the war and the Government surplus deals between the two firms immediately after it, but the relationship was to become even more significant in terms of workshop business. This broke the £1000 barrier in 1948 and was to stay in four figures right the way through to 1965. Although this was only about half the level in real terms of Vaughan's account in the1930s, much of the dealer business, particularly the sale of new guns, was money passing through Wilkes books. Jeffery's business on the other hand was mostly payment for work done in the Beak St workshop.

The trade between the two neighbouring firms wasn't all one way. As retail activity resumed on a modest scale after the war, Wilkes were evidently cautious about stocking up their shop with ammunition and shooting accessories. Jeffery apparently was less so, maintaining a well-stocked front shop and so provided Wilkes with a convenient occasional source for these items. The accounts payable ledgers show many such small transactions.

Jeffery, like the other trade customers sent round a stream of repair and refurbishment work, much of it on guns. For many years, Jeffery had relied on the services of several members of the

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Leonard family in Birmingham, both for making up new guns and rifles and for repairs. When the last of these, Charles Leonard, died in early 1950, Jeffery had even more work to send to Wilkes. Along with the repairs came a growing number of jobs making up new rifles, initially entirely bolt action sporting rifles. The full story of Wilkes' rifle making will be covered in the next chapter.

Post-War Retailing

Whilst retail customers continued to come into Wilkes shop in some numbers after the war, the trade was markedly more muted than in the 1930s. Even purchases of shotgun ammunition were more modest, few customers exceeding 500 rounds at a time. Price may have been a factor here. By 1948 this had a retail price of around £20 per thousand; roughly three times its pre-war level.

W.W. Dowding continued to make regular purchases after military service during the war in which he had reached the rank of Major. There are a number of small invoices for him in the ledger, but only one year end accumulation as in the 1930s. In August 1948 he paid a year end invoice, but then only for £87; this mostly for ammunition and for several stripping and cleaning jobs. Other pre-war customers continued to bring in a steady stream of small jobs, the Horne family continuing to provide more alteration jobs than reason would allow, and Jack did a steady trade retailing second-hand guns of his own and other makes.

There is one striking transaction in this last category. In February 1947 an Indian prince bought in one transaction several second-hand firearms; a pair of Purdeys, a pair of Westley Richards guns, a Newnham boxlock and a 6.5mm Mannlicher Schönauer rifle with 200 rounds of ammunition, for a total of £730. Packing cases for shipment to India were £2/10/0 extra. Jack sourced all of these through the trade, the Purdeys coming from Vaughan for £315. This one transaction was about 40% of retail turnover for the year. Otherwise retail business was running at barely £1000 a year at the end of the 1940s, in real terms about a third of its pre-war levels. For Wilkes to survive, work for the trade had to keep going.

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Chapter 10 – Rifle Maker & Trade Workshop 1950 – 1967

Retirements

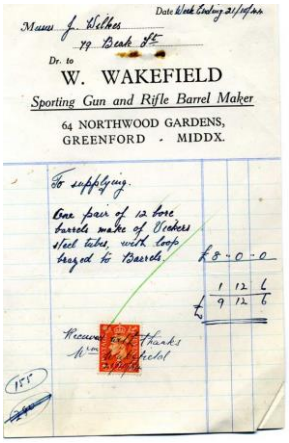
In 1950, Jack Wilkes was 64 years old, and his two sons, both working full time in the shop, were in their mid-twenties. Many of Jack's contemporaries, those that had helped him build guns in the 1920s and 1930s, had either already left the trade or were about to do so. This spate of retirements meant that Jack Wilkes, when rebuilding his business to fit the demand of the post-war period, would have to find either new sources of skills or bring work in-house. In the event he did some of both.

Retirement for this generation came not at a particular age threshold, as was to be common practice later in the century, but when age or infirmity made further work impossible. Average male life expectancy in the UK in 1950 was in the mid to late 60s and most of Jack's generation of gunmakers were older than that. In some cases, men carried on working almost up to the point of death, as Jack himself would do; in others there were a few years of retirement but this seems in many cases to have been overshadowed by frustration at not being able to work. The letters between Jack and Roly Bloomer's wife, when he was stuck at home unable to read at about 80 years of age, describe this. Going on a weekly outing to the Webley factory seems to be one of the few enjoyments left to him.

Harry Wheeler seems to have stopped work in 1945 at the age of about 73; the date of Wilkes last invoice from him for barrel repairs. This work and occasional barrel making passed to another member of our generation, Bill Wakefield.

Bill Wakefield

William Benjamin Davies Wakefield was born in 1889 as the third surviving child of an Army family in Bengal, India. In Dallas' book on Holland & Holland[15] he lists William Wakefield as working for them between 1902 and at least 1920 so he must have joined as an apprentice immediately after completing his schooling. Thereafter he worked for Boss for some time. In his book on that maker[14], Dallas describes an altercation between Henderson and Wakefield over pay for filing U&O barrels that caused the latter to leave shortly before the war. Wakefield did some work for Wilkes in the early 1930s, notably filing the barrels of George Horne's double 8 bore, but he did not take on significant amounts of work from Wilkes until 1944. Throughout the later 1940s he was kept busy, about £20 of work a month was given to him. Initially his printed invoices were addressed from his home in Greenford in West London, but around 1950 this switched to an address at 5 Crown Yard, Stanhope Street, very close to Boss' factory in Osnaburgh Street, near Euston station. Brown[7] lists him at that address between 1952 and 1954.


W. WAKEFIELD
Sporting Gun and Rifle Barrel Maker
64 NORTHWOOD GARDENS,
GREENFORD - MIDDX.

A wartime invoice from Wakefield for making a pair of barrels from his home address.

His work for Wilkes slowed after 1950, finishing entirely when he died suddenly in July 1953, Wilkes's last invoices from him not appearing in the ledger until a month after his death. John remembered Wakefield as having died at a young age, but that is relative. He was 64 when he died and had a working life that spanned just over 50 years.

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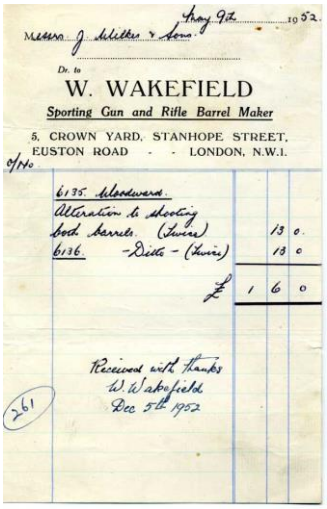
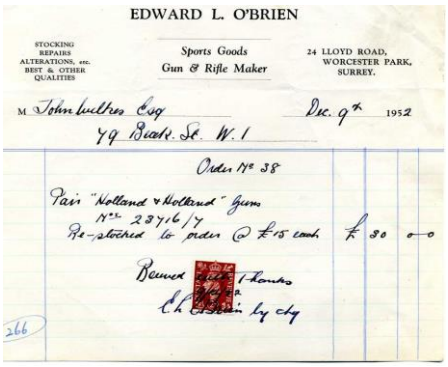
Walter Crathorn, who had made dozens of barrels for Wilkes in the 1930s, started to take on a few jobs again in the early 1950s, but he seems to have had difficulty getting these finished, in part because of his own health and in part because the people that he used to rely on for specialist work were no longer trading. There are several exchanges of letters with Jack trying ever so gently to pressure Walter into delivering a particular pair of much needed barrels. The last invoices from Walter were in 1954 from 14/10 Vesey Street, Birmingham, when Crathorn was 70. Thereafter barrel work was sent to W. Marshall until the 1960s. He worked in the same Vesey Street workshop as Crathorn.


Messrs. J. Wilkes & Sons
Dr. to
W. WAKEFIELD
Sporting Gun and Rifle Barrel Maker
5, CROWN YARD, STANHOPE STREET,
EUSTON ROAD - - LONDON, N.W.1.
6/10
6135. Woodwards
Alteration to shooting
both barrels (Twice) 13 0
6136. -Ditto- (Twice) 13 0
£ 1 6 0
Received with thanks
W. Wakefield
Dec 5th 1952
261

A year before his death Wakefield submitted this invoice for regulating a pair of Woodwards, from his workshop in the Euston Road.

On the stocking front, Dickie Bolter handled a lot of work throughout the war, but this came to an end in 1948, he was nearing 80 and his eyesight had deteriorated quite badly. Thomas Shelley, who was five years younger than Bolter stopped taking work from Wilkes in 1947. Stocking work through the shop did not diminish and much of this work was handled in house by the younger John and Tom. Some external help was called upon. Between 1952 and 1959 about 12 stocking jobs were sent to Edward L O'Brien who traded as a "Gun & Rifle Maker" from his home address in Worcester Park in the southwest suburbs, and one or two other outworkers handled the occasional job


EDWARD L. O'BRIEN
STOCKING REPAIRS ALTERATIONS, etc. BEST & OTHER QUALITIES
Sports Goods
Gun & Rifle Maker
24 LLOYD ROAD, WORCESTER PARK, SURREY.
M. John Wilkes Esq Dec. 9th 1952
49 Beak St. W.1
Order No 38
Pair "Holland & Holland" Guns
No. 23716/7
Re-stocked to order @ £15 each £30 0 0
Received with thanks
E.L. O'Brien by cty
266

An invoice for stocking a pair of Hollands from O'Brien in 1952.

In the years after the war, just about all of Wilkes engraving work gravitated to Kell. Although there were but a handful of new guns to engrave there was a steady stream of bits and pieces that flowed from restocking and alteration jobs, with some of this coming from rifle making. Some of Kell's invoices ran to several pages, few line items amounting to more than a shilling or two. Work continued to go to Kell for a year or so after he had closed his workshop in Broadwick Street and moved his bench to Purdey's factory. The last few jobs were paid for in cash rather than being invoiced, but there are letters from Jack, addressed to Kell's home advising of work being sent in the post up to a few months before his death in 1958. The other important supplier to Wilkes to close in the 1950s was the case maker Lewey who ceased trading in 1954. Unlike some of the other outworking trades there was readily available alternative in Robert Bryant.

Jeffery Bolt Action Rifles

Wilkes right from the start of the business had advertised themselves as a gun and rifle maker. By 1950, about 200 rifles that bore their name had been made. Of these 80% were boxlock doubles, the remainder being almost all bolt rifles in various calibres. All of the doubles and many of the bolt rifles had been made up for Wilkes by the Birmingham trade, the doubles mostly by John Harper, and the bolt rifles by a variety of outworkers who specialised in stocking and screwing commercial rifle actions. In 1945, with the Birmingham trade in disarray, Wilkes was set to embark on a new phase of rifle making, this time doing nearly all the work in Beak Street, and focussing most of their rifle production, although not quite all, on bolt actioned mechanisms. And whereas only some of Wilkes rifle production in the first three decades of the century had

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gone to other London makers, particularly Rigby, in the post war period nearly all of it would end up in customer's hands bearing a name other than Wilkes.

This started modestly immediately after the war. Jeffery favoured building their rifles in two stages, the first of which was to take a commercial action, adapt it as necessary for sporting use and stock it "in the white", a process referred to as making up to the shooting state. It usually then went back to them, for shooting and to await a customer who could specify certain aspects of the finish and sighting arrangements. Sometimes as little as a couple of weeks later or as long as several years it would then come back to the workshop for the stock to be finished, sometimes to have hand caps, nose caps and recoil pads fitted, the stock oiled and chequered, and the work polished, engraved and blacked as required. Occasionally different sighting arrangements were added at this stage. Rifles came in to Wilkes from Jeffery usually for either the first or second of these phases, and more rarely for both together. Jeffery supplied most of the materials, the barrel and action and stock blank, basic sight blocks and sights and sometimes other components like grip caps or sling swivels. Wilkes quite frequently made up or supplied more specialised sights.

In the four years from 1945 to 1948 Jeffery sent around 8 rifles a year to Wilkes for some part or all of their manufacture, these contributing about £100 a year to turnover in each of those years. In the early years they seem to have been using mainly commercially machined stocks, but subsequently there was more handwork in the product and unit charges went up accordingly. The rifles were mostly Mauser and P14 actions with a few other actions in the mix, and .375 and .404 were the most popular calibres. By 1948 Wilkes were charging £20 to make a rifle to shooting state using all Jeffery's materials, and £11 to finish it from that state. Features like 4 round magazines, cheek pieces or special sights were a small amount extra. Straightening the bolt handle, a common feature was an extra 12/6. Subsequently they introduced a more basic finishing stage which cost only £8, usually used on the smaller calibre rifles.

With John and Tom away between 1945 and 1948, Bolter and Shelley were infrequently used to stock bolt action rifles, but between them they did no more than 5, so most of the work of making up and finishing the rifles was being handled in the shop. There was one employee on payroll. S Whiteman, who had joined in 1940, stayed with the firm until the end of 1947. After John and Tom were back in the shop from mid-1948 onwards, volumes increased sharply, 19 rifles were made up in 1949 and 27 in 1950, by which time rifle making had reached a third of Wilkes turnover. It was to continue to be a major part of their business for almost 20 years, although volumes were to tail off after the late 1950s.

The rifles made for Jeffery by Wilkes fitted into a continuous sequence in their numbering system with few gaps, suggesting the Jeffery was very largely reliant on Wilkes for making their bolt rifles by 1950. In parallel with the making of new bolt rifles there came from Jeffery a steady stream of repairs and alterations to used rifles. These ranged from cleaning out barrels, through to complete re-stocking and rebuilding jobs, but most were to do with minor alterations to actions and sights – typically costing a pound or two per job.

There was some double rifle making as well. Jeffery sent round four double rifles as barrelled actions, which Wilkes then made up into complete rifles. The actions were missing safety work and triggers, and required these to be fitted along with the work of stocking, screwing and finishing, fitting up sights and the like. Three of these were A&D actions in .475 No 2, the other was a .450/.400 sidelock action in the white that needed locks and trigger plates fitted before being stocked. The boxlocks all came in between 1951 and 1953 for making into a shooting state, two of them coming back in for finishing three years later. The sidelock was made up in

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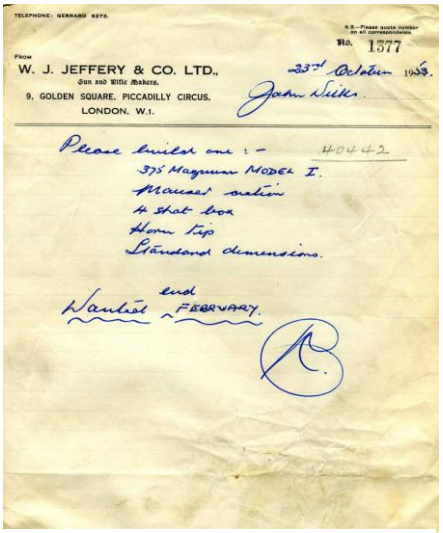
1961 and returned for finishing two years later. These jobs were individually priced but making up and finishing was typically charged at between £90 and £100.

Wilkes also refurbished and partly re-built about 20 of Jeffery's double rifles for them. These rebuilds, which were major projects that often involved re-jointing, re-stocking and re-sighting, often cost more than a complete bolt rifle make up. At least six of these were on Jeffery double .600s. As John would have been working on these, this may be the origin of his later claim about the extent of Wilkes' involvement in making .600 rifles. There was also one oddity. In 1961 Wilkes made up a single barrel boxlock trap gun for Jeffery no 5109 from a rough barrel and action state into a fully fitted out action with all internal work. For this they charged £47/10/0. The following year they did a similar job on a falling block action preparing it for stocking. It is possible that Jeffery were finishing off obsolete, partially finished stock in the hope of selling it.


W. J. JEFFERY & CO. LTD.,
Gun and Rifle Makers.
9, GOLDEN SQUARE, PICCADILLY CIRCUS.
LONDON, W.1.

No. 1577

23rd October 1953.

John Wilkes.

Please build one :- 40442
375 Magnum MODEL I.
Mauser action
4 shot box
Horn tip
Standard dimensions.

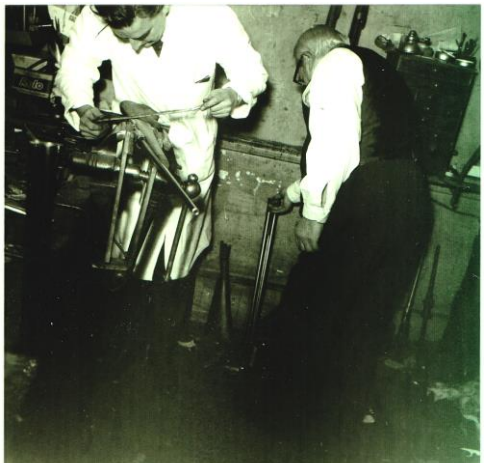
Wanted end FEBRUARY.

A 1953 order from Jeffery for the making up of a .375 Magnum bolt rifle.

The sources of the information on Wilkes rifle making for Jeffery and others are the invoice ledgers. Each rifle had a detailed invoice that specified the work done, in particular any extras that might involve an increase in price over what seems to have been a very long standing tariff for the basic work of stocking and finishing a bolt rifle. John Wilkes made up about 260 bolt rifles and 4 double rifles for Jeffery between October 1945, when the first job came in, and March 1964, when the last was finished. Alongside making up new bolt rifles, Jeffery were also sending round an even higher volume of major refurbishment jobs on existing bolt rifles

In the early years the majority of the Jeffery's rifles made by Wilkes were apparently basic grade and were charged at the standard tariffs, but from the mid 1950s there were an increasing number of higher specification rifles culminating in three "Model de Luxe". These were adorned with engraving, gold plating, ivory spacers and the like, the most expensive of these costing Jeffery £80 complete.

The post war years were a period of moderate inflation. By 1960 prices had roughly doubled since the war and shotgun cartridges were then costing £25 per thousand retail, about four times their pre-war price. Yet Jeffery was still being charged in 1957 the same price for making up a Mauser rifle as they had been 10 years previously, even though John and Tom's wages had more than doubled in that period. Thereafter Wilkes does seem to have been able to increase prices for rifle making largely masked by the move away from the basic grade to those with customised stocks or sights, extras for which charges could be made that perhaps gave a bit more margin. It remains a sobering thought that rifles in 1955 were being made up from a box of bits to the fully finished state for about the cost of 1250



There are few photographic records of Wilkes' rifle making. This rather poor picture from *ca* 1960 shows Tom making off a rifle stock with a drawknife whilst Jack props a pair of gun barrels against the wall.

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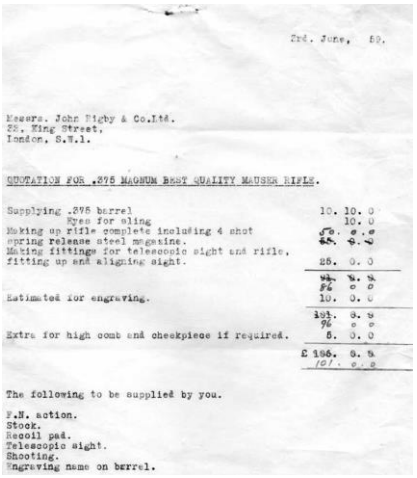
shotgun cartridges, or that a skilled gunmaker would need to work for a week to earn the price of 400 of these, after tax and deductions.

In the rifle making days, 79 Beak Street must have looked and felt more like a factory than a shop. With John often in the basement machining rifle stocks, and the line shafting rattling the whole building, the air of calm that pervaded the front shops of Purdey's or Holland's, must have been noticeably absent to customers coming off the street into No 79. Jack and Tom kept them in the shop, the practice of customers wandering upstairs almost uninvited was still some years away. Those few that Jack allowed to go upstairs to the workshop or down into the cellar would find John and Tom ankle deep in walnut shavings and swarf.

Rigby Rifles

John Rigby, who had been a significant trade customer of Wilkes in the 1920s and early 30s, started sending gun repair work to Wilkes again in 1954 and by 1957 these were running at about 2 jobs per week. There was just one rifle making job in 1955 amongst all the repairs, the finishing of a double sidelock .470. By September 1958 there are multiple invoices to Rigby for making up and finishing rifles, mostly bolt action in .416 and .275 calibres. Between late 1955 and 1966 a total of 51 bolt rifles and 6 doubles rifles were made up for Rigby. Initially these were returned to Rigby in the shooting state but later they were sent back fully finished, Wilkes work on them costing up to £60 each. In 1959, the run of bolt rifles was interspersed with just one gun when Rigby sent round a double sidelock 12 bore, stocked and in the white, for finishing, a job they did for £84. Rigby's rifle making work arrived just as Jeffery's was slowing down, helping to keep Wilkes' workshop fully occupied. Again, as with Jeffery, there was a plentiful flow of refurbishment work on existing rifles alongside the making of new ones.



3rd. June, 59.

Messrs. John Rigby & Co.Ltd.
72, King Street,
London, S.W.1.

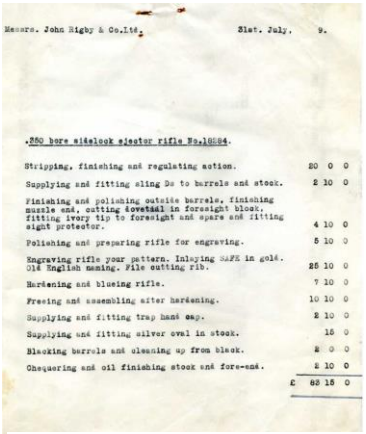
QUOTATION FOR .375 MAGNUM BEST QUALITY MAUSER RIFLE.

Supplying .375 barrel	10. 10. 0
Eyes for sling	10. 0
Making up rifle complete including 4 shot spring release steel magazine.	£8. 8. 0
Making fittings for telescopic sight and rifle, fitting up and aligning sight.	25. 0. 0
	£9. 8. 0
Estimated for engraving.	10. 0. 0
	£19. 8. 0
Extra for high comb and cheekpiece if required.	5. 0. 0
	£ 196. 8. 0

The following to be supplied by you.

F.N. action.
Stock.
Recoil pad.
Telescopic sight.
Shooting.
Engraving name on barrel.

File copy of a quote of 1959 to Rigby for making up a best .375 bolt rifle



Messrs. John Rigby & Co.Ltd. 31st. July, 59.

.350 bore sidelock ejector rifle No.18284.

Stripping, finishing and regulating action.	20 0 0
Supplying and fitting sling Ds to barrels and stock.	2 10 0
Finishing and polishing outside barrels, finishing muzzle end, cutting dovetail in foresight block, fitting ivory tip to foresight and spare and fitting sight protector.	4 10 0
Polishing and preparing rifle for engraving.	5 10 0
Engraving rifle your pattern. Inlaying GAME in gold. Old English naming. File cutting rib.	25 10 0
Hardening and blueing rifle.	7 10 0
Freeing and assembling after hardening.	10 10 0
Supplying and fitting trap hand cap.	2 10 0
Supplying and fitting silver oval in stock.	15 0
Blacking barrels and cleaning up from black.	2 0 0
Chequering and oil finishing stock and fore-end.	2 10 0
	£ 83 15 0

Copy invoice to Rigby's for finishing rifle no 18284.

By the 1960s, Rigby's business fortunes were in decline. Craig Whitsey recalled the window of their Sackville Street shop in the 1960s being occupied with a display, not of shooting paraphernalia, but of outboard motors. Gun repair work continued to come in until 1967 in dwindling amounts and thereafter there were only occasional jobs. Two moves of premises in the 1960s left Rigby's trading from the basement of Farlow's fishing tackle shop at 13 Pall Mall in 1969, where they remained until 1985, the firm then moving to share premises with J. Roberts & Son, who had by then acquired a controlling interest.

David Lloyd

Another specialist rifle maker to make use of Wilkes' workshop was David Lloyd. Lloyd was principally an engineer and a keen stalker who developed and made small calibre stalking rifles with low mounted telescopic sights whose mounts were an integral part of the action, rather than

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a detachable addition. Lloyd needed rifle makers who were able and willing to stock and finish his actions, and in Wilkes he had such a maker.

As a customer whose primary business was in the workshop he was allowed upstairs, where he would arrive immaculately dressed, something of a problem given that just about every surface was usually coated with either the latest eruption from the blacking pot, red oil or the dust of whatever had last been shaped on the grindstone. Lloyd countered this by wearing kid gloves at all times, a bit like royalty. He would usually visit Wilkes on his monthly trip to London to get his hair cut and buy toiletries in Jermyn Street. On one such trip he asked John if he could have an unfitted Silver's pad, which John duly got out of the drawer and handed to him. He didn't take it; it was not at all the sort of thing he would want to carry, asking instead that it be wrapped and posted to him.

In 1964/5 Wilkes made up four rifles for him, stocking, naming and finishing them for £50 each. Business with Lloyd would continue well into the 1970s. Craig Whitsey remembers several rifles being made up for Lloyd. Wilkes became experts at the complex task of regulating a Lloyd rifle to shoot where the telescope was pointing. In the 1970s, John would visit the annual Game Fair, where Wilkes never bothered with a stand, John preferring to hold court as Lloyd's guest on his stand. The relationship eventually was strained, as Lloyd started to view Wilkes as unpaid employees. Craig remembers that Lloyd would come in to look at a finished rifle, its stock oiled and chequered, and would then decide he'd like a particular part of the stock, perhaps the cheek piece or the grip, to be a slightly different shape, seemingly oblivious of the amount of rework, which wouldn't be charged, that even a small cosmetic change would require. Eventually Tom had words with Lloyd and he gradually moved his stocking work elsewhere.

Appendix 7 lists the numbers of all of the 325 rifles, by Jeffery, Rigby, Lloyd and Holland & Holland that were made wholly or in part in 79 Beak Street between 1945 and 1968.

Sights, Magazines and Bolts

A recurrent feature of the rifle invoices is the wide variety of sights and sight blocks that were ordered for bolt rifles. Whilst a few rifles had telescopic sights fitted, the majority in the 1950s had open sights of some kind. Wilkes were often called on to supply and fit these for which they required a variety of specialised machinings. When Hinchley interviewed Frank Stokes in Price Street in 1948, he described in detail the process of making blocks of folding leaf sights by hand[20]. But with these skills in short supply Wilkes, in the immediate aftermath of the war, had no difficulty finding small engineering firms that had equipped themselves with machine tools for war work, only to find when this ended that they had to look for new articles to manufacture. Wilkes commissioned some of these to make sights for their own use, and also seem to have found a ready market for them with other gunmakers.

In June 1948, Wilkes ordered from Ward and Pollard Ltd, of Orchard Works in Woolwich, 100 each of fore sight and rear sight blocks for .375 No2 rifles, for a total cost of £132/10/0. This order was repeated a few weeks later. About the same time, they ordered 100 rifle foresights from Holland & Holland for £21/5/0. All of these items were sold immediately to Jeffery at cost, but with a 5% surcharge to cover one-time costs getting them made up. Doubtless many of them came back to Beak Street in the coming years in one of Jeffery's kits of parts that accompanied each order. In 1950 and 1951 another 200 pairs of blocks were ordered from the same supplier, also going straight to Jeffery, this time in .404 sizes. But many rifles were ordered with unusual sighting arrangements. Wilkes were ordering supplies of pre-cut or partly machined metal, but the

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actual make up of these components into scope mounts, sight protectors and other paraphernalia was apparently done in the shop.

A common request was the adaption of magazines to higher capacity, and HAC engineers, round the corner in Broadwick Street, who had contributed to Wilkes war work for DON, performed the basic welding, leaving Wilkes do the job of finishing and fitting out to customer specification. Bolt handles were straightened by cutting and welding, followed by shaping and finishing, a local welder doing the initial rough weld for two shillings a time. Although Wilkes themselves had developed the tools for finally machining rifle stocks prior to stocking, a local timber yard, R.N. Cattle of Poland Street, was taking on the work of band sawing the stocks and roughly machining them. Blacking of barrels and some of the actions was handled as usual by Johnsons, small parts and some actions being blacked in the pot in the shop.

Wilkes must also have been hardening small parts. One of the more striking invoices to survive is for a cash sale from Henry Cooper & Co. Ltd, Manufacturing Chemists of 24 Greek Street, Soho. It is for two items bought over the counter, ninepence worth of something illegible, and sixpence worth of Prussiate of Potash – potassium cyanide. We can only wonder what safety precautions were in place when this was being used in the workshop at Beak Street; probably rather few.

Gun Repairs and Alterations

When the work for Rigby drew to a close in the early sixties it brought to an end a period when Wilkes' business had been largely dependent on making up rifles. Rifle making would remain an important part of the firm's business for the rest of the century, and the total immersion that John and Tom had in this part of the trade would pay dividends for them in the future.

During this period of the firm's dependency on rifle making, the stream of gun work going through the shop was unabated. The trade customers who were sending in this work were experiencing mixed fortunes as their retail businesses began to revive in the 1950s. Some would survive this period of change and others would not. So the long term and mutually dependent trade relationships that had existed before the war, like that with Vaughan, would be replaced with more short term associations. Jack's challenge would have been to keep enough of these on the go to keep the workshop fully busy without taking on more work than he could get done in the time expected.

With many fewer new guns being made, the trade after the war turned increasingly to the refurbishment and re-sale of second-hand firearms to keep up their businesses. Many of the London workshops had either closed entirely or were running with much reduced staff compared to pre-war levels, and Birmingham was also in disarray. Against this background it is unsurprising that Wilkes should find a queue of trade customers wanting them to undertake workshop repairs and refurbishment for them. Amongst the most significant of these new customers was Westley Richards.

Westley Richards Agency

On 1st January 1948 Malcolm Lyell, a young man in his mid-20s with an interest in shooting, a flair for salesmanship, and no experience of the gun trade was appointed as manager designate of Westley Richards London retail outlet in Conduit Street, Mayfair. He became manager three months later and a director of the firm in 1951. The parent company in Birmingham, where all the manufacturing for this great maker was done, had been turned over to war work during hostilities, and had decided to go into voluntary liquidation after the war. By the time of Lyell's arrival, the new owners had the retail outlet in London working as an arm's length operation. The London

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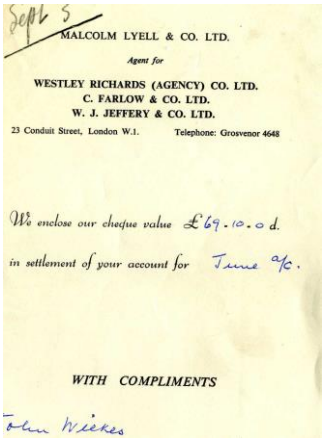
end of the business had a long pedigree going back over a century when the founder of the firm had recognised the need to be able to sell his products directly to customers in the capital. Lyell seems to have been very successful in developing the business in London, such that when in 1956 the Westley Richards board proposed moving the London outlet to smaller premises, he was able to raise the capital to buy it; the company so formed becoming Westley Richards (Agency) Co Ltd, and having the right to use the WR name. The following year Lyell negotiated the purchase of both W.J. Jeffery and Farlows, the fishing tackle specialist in Pall Mall, moving all three into the Conduit Street premises. Malcolm Lyell was to be one of the most influential agents of change in the post war gun trade and will appear again in the story of John Wilkes.

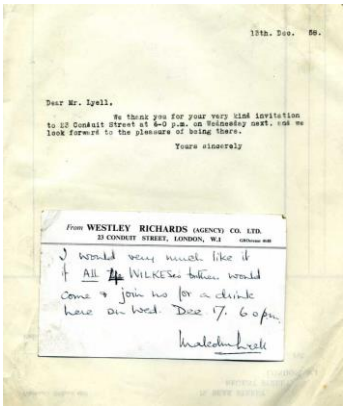
Westley Richards's use of Wilkes as a workshop, which had begun very modestly in 1948, built up to over £1000 a year of business by 1953. Few of the jobs they sent round were large, many of them involved simple work that could have been done in a few minutes, like checking proof or advising on the reparability of barrels for which often no charge was raised, so this amount of turnover represented 300-500 jobs a year. George Strachan, who at the time was front shop man for Westley Richards, recalled constantly walking back and forth the half mile or so between Conduit Street and Beak Street carrying guns to and from Wilkes. The work coming into Wilkes continued unabated through the change of ownership, their first invoice to the Agency being tendered in July 1957. Wilkes were doing maintenance jobs on WR guns that came into the London shop for repair, and work supporting the buying and selling of second hand guns by Westley Richards (Agency). Similar work was simultaneously being done for Jeffery and, from 1949 onwards for W.W. Greener's London branch, and, from 1954 onwards, for Rigby.


Sept 5
MALCOLM LYELL & CO. LTD.
Agent for
WESTLEY RICHARDS (AGENCY) CO. LTD.
C. FARLOW & CO. LTD.
W. J. JEFFERY & CO. LTD.
23 Conduit Street, London W.1. Telephone: Grosvenor 4648
We enclose our cheque value £'69.10.0 d.
in settlement of your account for June a/c.
WITH COMPLIMENTS
John Wilkes

Malcolm Lyell's mercurial expansion caused a bewildering range of letter heads to appear in Wilkes' records. This invoice from 1958 was after the inclusion of Jeffery.

The striking feature of job tickets from this period from all four of these makers, who between them were monopolising Wilkes trade book, is that they are very often not sending specified jobs round; rather they are sending guns round for assessment. Wilkes were expected to tell the customer what needed to be done, suggesting none of them had access to skilled men of their own in their front shops able to tender this advice.

Within a year of Jeffery being absorbed into the Agency, all Wilkes accounts with both that maker and WR were accounted under the Jeffery name, so that from the perspective of the books, business with Jeffery surges as that from WR peters out. The tickets reveal the balance of work to be much as before. At the end of both 1958 and 1959 there are personal invitations in the files from Mr Lyell to Beak Street, asking the Wilkes to the WR Agency Christmas parties, the first of these making a point that all four Mr Wilkes were invited, not just the older two. The Agency was not the end of Mr Lyell's ambitions; in 1959 he merged it with Holland & Holland, moving in to their premises at 13 Bruton Street. He became Managing Director of Holland & Holland in 1960, a post he was to hold for 24 years. The Agency businesses continued to run separately after the merger and Wilkes continued to take on a still growing amount of work for Jeffery until 1965. But the merger also triggered Holland


18th. Dec. 58.
Dear Mr. Lyell,
We thank you for your very kind invitation to 22 Conduit Street at 6-0 p.m. on Wednesday next, and we look forward to the pleasure of being there.
Yours sincerely
From WESTLEY RICHARDS (AGENCY) CO. LTD. 23 CONDUIT STREET, LONDON, W.1
I would very much like it if All 4 WILKES brothers would come & join us for a drink here on Wed. Dec 17. 6 o'clock
Malcolm Lyell

The 1958 invitation to all four Wilkes brothers to attend the WR (Agency) Christmas party and the firm's reply.

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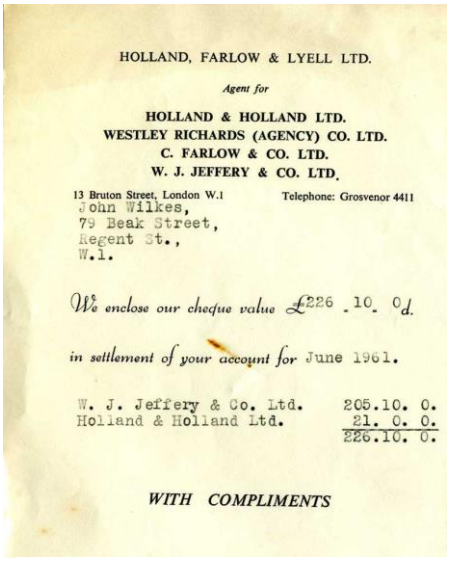
& Holland, who had been an occasional trade customer of Wilkes, to start sending work round. Initially this was mostly restocking work, and mostly on guns of their own make, but later there was some refurbishment added to the mix. By 1965 the Jeffery business seems to have gone dormant within Holland & Holland. For Wilkes this loss was offset partly by a surge in trade work from Hollands themselves, which although slowing after a few years, continued into the 1980s.



HOLLAND, FARLOW & LYELL LTD.

Agent for

HOLLAND & HOLLAND LTD.
WESTLEY RICHARDS (AGENCY) CO. LTD.
C. FARLOW & CO. LTD.
W. J. JEFFERY & CO. LTD.

13 Bruton Street, London W.1 Telephone: Grosvenor 4411

John Wilkes,
79 Beak Street,
Regent St.,
W.1.

We enclose our cheque value £226 .10. 0d.

in settlement of your account for June 1961.

W. J. Jeffery & Co. Ltd.	205.10. 0.
Holland & Holland Ltd.	21. 0. 0.
	226.10. 0.

WITH COMPLIMENTS

A 1960 Letterhead accompanying payment for work done for both Jeffery and Holland & Holland.

W.W. Greener

Like other leading Birmingham makers, Greener had maintained a London showroom since the late 19th century. After 1928 this was at 40 Pall Mall. Apart from the very occasional transaction there had been few dealings with Wilkes until about 1950, whereupon Greener started to send a growing amount of work, all of it refurbishment, repair and alterations, to Beak Street. Greener's Birmingham factory, very much the hub of their business, struggled to get back into gun production after the war, so the London workshop services available from Wilkes were an attractive alternative. In volume terms their work reached a peak in the late 1950s at about £300 a year, roughly the same level as the gun repairs then coming from Rigby. In the 1960s this dwindled gradually, finally ending in 1967, the year in which Greener closed the Pall Mall showroom after the takeover by Webley of two years earlier. The showroom manager, Ernest Kempster, carried on the business briefly from an address near King's Cross, and he too used Wilkes as a workshop. As with the work coming from Westley Richards, Wilkes were given few unusual work orders amongst a steady stream of routine jobs, but total turnover mounted steadily to about £3500, making Greener their fifth largest trade customer in money of the day terms for the period from 1928 to 1968.

The sixties also saw trade work starting to come in from two other companies. William Evans in St James's Street had occasional transactions with Wilkes over many years, but in the early 1960s small jobs started to come in steadily from Evans, and Tom was to continue a cordial relationship with their shop until the end of the century. The other surprise customer was Cogswell & Harrison, with whom relations had never been close since the glass breaking incident of the 1880s. A flurry of jobs came in from them, but only for two years 1963/64. So by 1967 there wasn't a gunmaker in London who hadn't had some job or other done by Wilkes in their workshop in Beak Street.

Moss Bros.

C.B. Vaughan had become C.B. Vaughan (Guns) Ltd just before the proprietors' death in 1946, and it was this firm that was acquired by the gentleman's outfitter, Moss Bros in the 1950s. For a while it seems to have been dormant, certainly insofar as work sent to Wilkes was concerned, but in 1964 a few jobs were sent to Wilkes under the original name. The following year a flurry of work started to arrive under the Moss name. The outfitter had been persuaded to set up a gunroom to run alongside its well-known and much used clothes hire business. They could now cater to the needs of any unfortunate arriviste caught out by an unexpected invitation to a weekend's shooting by hiring him a gun along with his shooting suit. They also planned to buy and sell guns. To run this gun room they had hired George Strachan, lately of Westley Richards

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Agency, and George used his friends at Wilkes to provide all the trade connections needed to back the venture up – particularly the supply of second-hand guns for sale and workshop services, but in the mix of items sold were a few oddities to give atmosphere to the gunroom, like an A&D barrelled action and a few stock blanks.

Webley & Scott, whose three-gun range of boxlocks; the 700, 701 and 702 were well established, had taken over what was left of the Greener business in 1965 and wanted to release a new sidelock model, the Webley Greener 1100 or Conquest as it was also known. The Moss Bros. gunroom was chosen as the London launch venue so that both the gun and the gun room could share the same blaze of introductory publicity. I remember going to look at the gun, a competently made sidelock with Holland style engraving. Sadly both the gun and the gun room had short existences. Of the former I have never seen one of them since, although about 27 of them were made. The gun room's fate is more clearly understood. Prior to 1967 there were only token licensing arrangements for shotguns in the UK, but in 1966 three police officers were shot with pistols in West London. The Government response was to tighten the regulations for licensing shotguns, introducing in 1967 a new Shotgun Certificate that was issued by the Police. This arrangement made more difficult the concept of the casual hiring of a gun by an individual who did not otherwise own one. Moss Bros. struggled on with the Gun Room, running it primarily as a straightforward shop into the 70s, but it closed about 1975, and with it went the last remaining vestiges of Vaughan's business.

Foreign Imports - S.J. Carr & Co Ltd

Wing Commander S.J.Carr was a retired RAF officer who realised in the early 1960s that the UK market for well-made inexpensive shotguns, particularly under & overs, was undersupplied by the domestic trade and by the importers then operating. He knew the German gun market and set up an import business to bring some of their better mass produced guns to the UK. There was still at the time a stigma attached to foreign guns, and in particular issues about whether continental proof arrangements were on a par with those in the UK. Carr had premises in Bloomsbury from 1963, moving to share the shop with Rigby at 28 Sackville Street in Mayfair in 1965. He planned to undertake a certain amount of Anglicisation of guns prior to sale. He needed a workshop that could do this and which also could undertake pre- and post-sale adjustments. He was a private customer of Wilkes, so chose them for these roles. Although he started off in 1962 bringing in examples of several makes of German guns, he soon gravitated towards mainly but not exclusively the U&O guns made by Merkel.

The initial work done by Wilkes was simple; barrels were lapped up to the next UK proof size and submitted to proof, no other work apart from disassembly and reassembly being done, this costing Carr £4/15/0 per gun. In October 1962, two guns by Wolf, one by Buhag, three by Simson, and three by Merkel were all proved in one batch. Sometimes there were complications – a Merkel gun submitted in 1963 bulged at proof in the top barrel, but passed on resubmission after repairs. Soon extra work started to be undertaken. Removing cheek pieces, re-shaping the stock, colouring and oil finishing woodwork, removing sling swivels, fitting silver ovals and converting safeties to automatic were all undertaken.

Carr was providing bespoke Merkel guns to order; stock and choke adjustments were routinely altered to customer requirements. When needing to impress customers he would sometime bring them round to Beak Street, announcing "…and here are my workforce" as he swept them through the door. By 1964 no two guns coming in to Wilkes had exactly the same work done on them. One or two were even re-hardened. A common alteration was to strike some of the Merkel naming from the barrel, replacing it with S.J. Carr's name and Sackville Street address, adding

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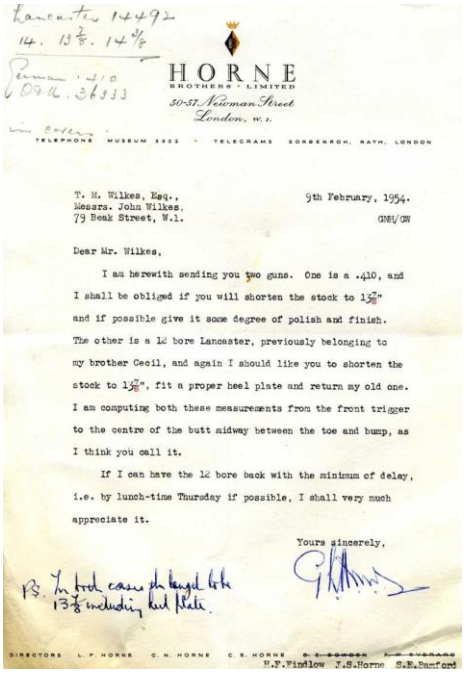
the arguably misleading words "Product of England". This was legal at the time, but legislation intended to protect UK manufacturing introduced in 1968 prohibited such wording on a UK finished but imported product. In February 1966, a Merkel 303E sidelock gun was subjected to a complete rebuild, involving restocking with a good quality blank with gold oval, fitting a leather covered pad, the addition of gold inlay and gilding of lock work, followed by re-hardening, all for £128/10/0 – the most expensive of the jobs undertaken on a gun of this make. By early 1967 Carr moved again, this time to establish a gun room in Austin Reed's outfitters shop in Regent Street, whereupon the number of English gun refurbishment jobs he sent to Wilkes increased.

His business ultimately went the same way as Moss Bros gun room, but in the years in which he traded he contributed about £3000 to Wilkes turnover, about the same as Moss. His example of using Wilkes to provide domestic workshop services for imported guns was followed by LePersonne who sent round a small but steady stream of jobs on Browning automatic and U&O guns, and by the import agent for Darne, with whom business was smaller still. Most of this work in the mid-sixties came at a time when the trade work from Jeffery, Rigby and Greener was running down, It filled a gap along with another important change – the resurgence in the 1960s of a retail trade, although a very different type of retail trade from that which had blossomed in the 1930s. It also gave Wilkes over the coming years a steady stream of work from customers with Merkel guns.

Retail Trade – 1950s and 1960s

An interesting perspective on the health of the retail market is given by the volumes of business flowing over time from the group of enthusiastic sportsmen who were Wilkes best retail customers of the 1930s, whose business then was covered in Chapter 8. Most of these were born around the turn of the century, prosperous young men in the thirties, old enough mostly to have missed military service in the 1940s, and middle aged when prosperity began to return in the 1950s. The average spend of this group together with the firm was £500 per year in the thirties falling to £70 a year in the forties and rising again to £200 in the fifties. Within this group there were identifiable trends. Before the war they bought themselves new guns, in some cases quite a lot of new guns; during the war and immediately after the spend was mainly consumables like ammunition and then only in small quantities; but a decade later they are buying much more ammunition and are regularly having to get their guns maintained to handle a growing amount of wear and tear brought about by much more shooting. Some, like Major Dowding and George Horne, bought different guns on the second-hand market; in the former's case to lessen the risk of excessive use to his "Best" guns, in the latter's to find lighter tools. Cecil Horne bought at least two pairs of second hand guns and made numerous changes to them in an effort to improve their fit. The lull in retail business that had begun in the 1940s was coming to an end in the 1960s. Retail account numbers, which had risen barely at all between 1940 and 1960, were to rise 60% by 1970, when Wilkes would have close to 700 active retail customers.



HORNE
BROTHERS LIMITED
30-37 Newman Street
London, W.1.

TELEPHONE MUSEUM 3933 TELEGRAMS SORBERRON, WATH, LONDON

T. M. Wilkes, Esq.,
Messrs. John Wilkes,
79 Beak Street, W.1.

9th February, 1954.
GNH/GW

Dear Mr. Wilkes,

I am herewith sending you two guns. One is a .410, and I shall be obliged if you will shorten the stock to 15" and if possible give it some degree of polish and finish. The other is a 12 bore Lancaster, previously belonging to my brother Cecil, and again I should like you to shorten the stock to 15", fit a proper heel plate and return my old one. I am computing both these measurements from the front trigger to the centre of the butt midway between the toe and bump, as I think you call it.

If I can have the 12 bore back with the minimum of delay, i.e. by lunch-time Thursday if possible, I shall very much appreciate it.

Yours sincerely,

P.S. In fact can I have it back by 4th 13⅞ including heel plate.

DIRECTORS L.F. HORNE G.N. HORNE C.E. HORNE H.F.Findlow J.S.Horne S.E.Bamford

A 1954 letter from George Horne requesting urgent alterations to two guns.

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New Guns

New gun making in the nearly two decades covered by this chapter was very subdued. A precise account of it is hampered by the quality, and often complete absence, of entries in the register. Possibly this was because volumes were so low that this record became overlooked, but it is more likely that entries were sparse because some new guns were sold for cash. From those records that do survive Wilkes made at least eighteen boxlock guns, all best or 2nd quality, in the period between 1950 and 1967. The first group of three, which were made up in the late 1940s, were barrelled by Crathorn, actioned by E. Smith & Sons of 10a St Mary's Row in Birmingham, stocked by Bolter and engraved by Kell. Smith at the time was charging £37/10/0 for a best boxlock action, un-stocked and with barrels supplied by Wilkes. One of these has particularly sparse details recorded; the register revealing only that 15093 was a best 12 bore A&D, actioned by Smith, barrelled by Crathorn and sold to a longstanding customer, E.M.Ginn. There are no invoices in the ledgers, either for the making of the gun or for its sale, which must have been around 1951, presumably for cash. From its appearance at auction in 2014, we now know it was made with 28" chopper lump barrels with Churchill rib, a full beavertail 12" fore end, a point finished stock, a scroll backed screwed pin action adorned with Kell's best scroll and flowers pattern, with a pheasant on the bow of a beaded guard and the customer's name on the fore end iron.

15095 was a best boxlock that was made up largely in the shop *ca* 1952 on a scalloped back screwed pin action. There is no record of it in the register. The loop was loose when this picture was taken hence the gap at the knuckle.

In mid-1949 Wilkes bought from Webley & Scott a boxlock 12 bore for £45. It was stocked, with a scalloped body, and sold to them in the white at a 25% discount on the £60 price of the gun had it been fully finished. The records don't reveal what happened to this gun. There were at least two guns made in the early fifties for which the only surviving records are invoices from Kell for engraving them. The first of these was numbered 15096, sold in late 1953, for which there are no records at all. The second was numbered 9023, which was a single number that was left unused in the sequence in the 1920s. More details of this gun and its owner are in the next section.

Of the final group, made up between 1957 and 1967, several were barrelled by Marshall and actioned by various Birmingham firms, including one done by Harper, and some were stocked and screwed by O'Brien. Retail prices for these guns increased steadily from about £100 for those sold in the 1950s to reach £200 for the last one sold in 1967. The first gun of this final group was also engraved by Kell, the last Wilkes gun he was to adorn. This gun, 15097, was sold to Major Rowat, formerly of DON but, by 1957 when he took delivery of the gun, he was a private customer. He paid £135 for it. His measurements required a highly cast off stock. His gun came up for sale at Christie's in 1989 in little used condition. It was bought by Tom who re-sold it for £2800 a year or two later. The catalogue photograph reveals that Kell named the gun on the bar "John Wilkes & Sons"; a name that had last been used in the mid-twenties when the firm was also approaching a change of ownership between generations. If this was Jack heralding the

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passing of the baton to the next generation, a further decade was to pass before this was reflected in the partnership agreement. It could equally well have been that Kell made a mistake.

15097, Major Rowat's gun, showing the unusual naming.

The next gun in the register, 15104, is a 20 bore boxlock sold at the end of 1963 to George Horne for £175. This too has come up for sale, this time in 2010 at Bonham's. Again there are no details in the register, but the catalogue reveals it to be a 26" barrelled gun weighing 5lbs 4 oz, with a scalloped action back and point finished stock. There is an invoice just before this gun was finished from John Harper for making up the action of this gun from parts supplied to the state where it was ready for stocking for £59/0/0 plus postage. This was the last major piece of work undertaken by Harper for Wilkes. The gun has Baker pattern scroll engraving, apparently executed by an engraver named Foster. The action bridge has minute mitre like file cuts at each of its corners, a signature feature of both Jack and his son John, applied just before sending a gun to the hardener. The last in the batch, a 28 bore sold to an American customer in 1967 for £200, is the only one of the three to have full details in the register. It was one of the Wilkes guns in this period engraved by Malcolm Appleby.

George Horne's last gun, No 15104 with scroll back action, best extractors and Baker pattern engraving.

15104 bridge detail

There were discussions in the shop about the wafer thin profit margins on making new guns in this period, these reaching the point where the elder Tom was turning away customers enquiring about having guns made for them. Where customers wanted new double guns, Wilkes did a brisk trade in the 1960s selling the Webley & Scott 700 range. All of these in the ledgers are the

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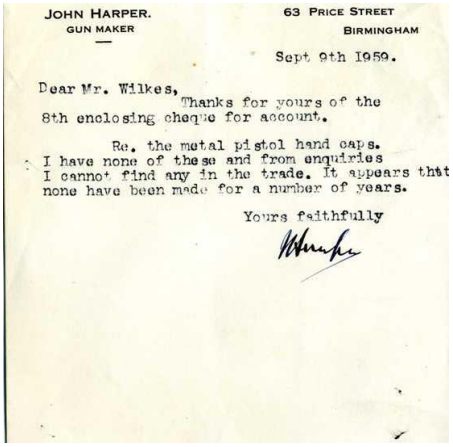
Webley branded version and mostly the basic grade 700 model, Wilkes were not doing anything to customise them and they were sold for the recommended list price. In 1965 a Mr Noble bought one of these and took it away. A note in the invoice book states that the bank had informed them that the cheque used to pay for it was from a stolen book, making this a relatively rare instance of an unrecoverable debt in the books.

The frantic period of bolt action rifle making in the shop had resulted in only one or two of these being made up for retail customers. 15112 was a best rifle in 7mm Remington magnum, made up on a commercial Mauser action, engraved with full scroll on the action, coverplate and grip cap and fitted with open sights and a scope mount fitted with a Kahles scope. In its canvas full length case, its customer was charged £227/10/0 for it in November 1964, but he was so pleased with it that he rounded the bill up to £250. When he sold it at Christies 22 years later, Tom bought it in for £1900, selling it in 1987 to another customer for £2350, its new owner returning it to have a new scope fitted in 1991.

Rifle No 15122 as it appeared in Christie's catalogue in 1986.

The difficulty that Jack experienced getting these few guns made up is strongly reflected in surviving correspondence. Letters on file show him having to make almost continuous special pleading to the outworkers of the day to get them to turn around work in time. There are also letters asking acquaintances in the Birmingham trade if they know where to get certain jobs done. One such request involved asking the lock maker Stanton for a new Purdey pattern lever spring, an order they would have filled as routine before the war, only to have them refer the request to Purdey who duly supplied the part. Two letters from John Harper around 1960 describe how he has scoured the trade without success looking for a supply of metal grip caps for rifles and on another occasion he reported that his search for a supplier of ventilated ribs was equally unsuccessful.



JOHN HARPER.
GUN MAKER

63 PRICE STREET
BIRMINGHAM

Sept 9th 1959.

Dear Mr. Wilkes,

Thanks for yours of the 8th enclosing cheque for account.

Re. the metal pistol hand caps. I have none of these and from enquiries I cannot find any in the trade. It appears that none have been made for a number of years.

Yours faithfully

Mr Harper's letter of 1959 on the subject of metal hand caps.

Harper had reflected similar frustrations in an earlier interview with Hinchley[21] in April 1951. The recent retirement from the trade of Joseph Asbury removed the one source of machined boxlock actions, as Phillipson's, who were still working, only provided sidelock machinings at the time. The last rib forger in Birmingham, Harold Trueman had just died, and Mr Harper had no idea who could then supply top ribs. Trueman was also, according to Mr Harper, the last man in

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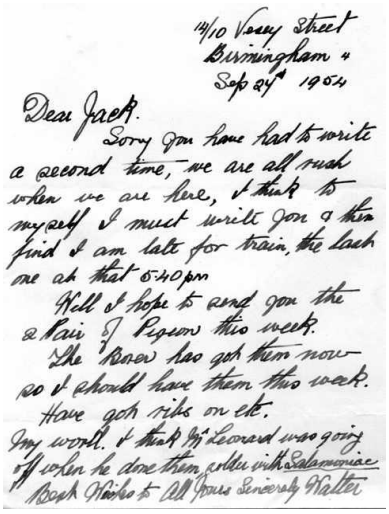
Birmingham who knew how to forge a damascus barrel. And BSA, the only supplier of barrel tubes at the time were only making them in 12 bore.

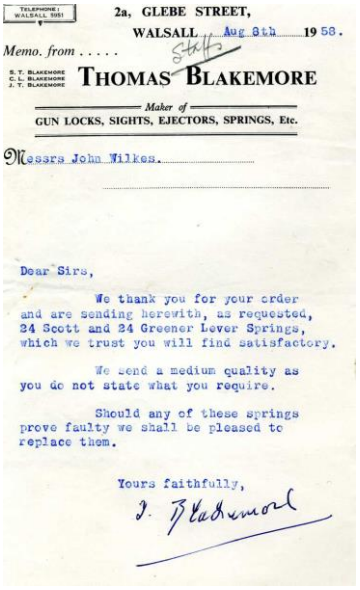
At this time Wilkes were using Thomas Blakemore, of 2a Glebe Street in Walsall to supply parts, springs, forgings and the like, and to do a whole range of lock repairs. Blakemore's letterhead describes him as a "Maker of gun locks, sights, ejectors, springs etc." He was supplying standard spring types to Wilkes by the dozen and undertaking the making of customised parts as well. Jack writes a letter asking if Mr Blakemore knows anyone who will undertake the re-facing of barrel strikers, only to elicit a negative response. Just about everything needed to make guns seemed to be becoming more and more difficult to get, and when a supply did exist there was a queue of other customers with prior claims.



11/10 Vesey Street
Birmingham 4
Sep 24th 1954

Dear Jack.
Sorry you have had to write a second time, we are all rush when we are here, I think to myself I must write Jack & then find I am late for train, the last one at that 5.40 pm
Well I hope to send you the 2 pair J Pigeon this week.
The Rover has got them now so I should have them this week.
Have got ribs on etc.
My word. I think Mr Leonard was going it when he done them grips with Salammoniac
Best Wishes to All Yours Sincerely Walter

A letter from Walter Crathorn in 1954 in response to a gentle enquiry from Jack about progress of a major barrel repair. The barrels, probably on a Jeffery gun, were apparently originally made by one of the Leonard family to whom there is a reference at the end.



TELEPHONE: WALSALL 1951
2a, GLEBE STREET,
WALSALL Aug 8th 1958.
Memo. from .....
S.T. BLAKEMORE C.L. BLAKEMORE J.T. BLAKEMORE
THOMAS BLAKEMORE
Maker of
GUN LOCKS, SIGHTS, EJECTORS, SPRINGS, Etc.
Messrs John Wilkes.

Dear Sirs,

We thank you for your order and are sending herewith, as requested, 24 Scott and 24 Greener Lever Springs, which we trust you will find satisfactory.

We send a medium quality as you do not state what you require.

Should any of these springs prove faulty we shall be pleased to replace them.

Yours faithfully,
T. Blakemore

Blakemores were in 1958 apparently still a good source for lever springs.

Malcolm Appleby

At the time of writing, Malcolm Appleby has recently turned 70, and after being awarded an MBE in 2014 for services to hand engraving, is one of the country's most celebrated artists in metal. An exhibition to mark this anniversary featured a wide range of his work; covering jewellery, tableware, medallions, and presentation pieces. There is much information in the public domain about Malcolm and his vast and varied portfolio of work, including many photos of his finest pieces. What follows is mainly confined to his relationship with John Wilkes and all that flowed from that. Whilst his work on guns has now become just part of an extraordinarily broad portfolio, the origins of this aspect go back over sixty years to an early encounter with the firm; an association which would have a strong influence on both parties for over fifty years. The story of Malcolm's work with Wilkes is therefore worth recounting in detail even though it represents now a rather small part of his lifetime's work.

The infant Appleby was introduced to shooting by his father at an early age. He remembers being taken as a child on shooting expeditions, where he was expected to perform the role of supplementary gun dog. His family lived in the same area on the outskirts of London as Jack Wilkes and his sons, and the two families were friends. In May 1954, for a price of £75, Jack had made a box lock gun 9023 for Malcolm's uncle, S.J Appleby, one of the last that were engraved by Henry Kell. Malcolm, who was eight years old at the time, recalled being in the shop when his

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uncle took delivery of the gun, and even at this an early age he remembers being fascinated by the gunmaker's shop.

By the time he left school in 1961, Malcolm was set to pursue a career in art. He studied at local art schools, developing an interest in the design of engraving on sporting guns based on Greek classical mythology. These he showed to the Wilkes family who encouraged him to become an engraver, recommending that he contact Purdey's, where an interview was arranged for him with Harry Lawrence, their Managing Director at the time, at their Paddington Factory. Malcolm was turned down by Purdey, but did gain entry to the Central School of Arts and Crafts to study engraving under Fred Fryer and Denis McQuoid. Fred had worked for the securities printer de la Rue where elaborate scroll engraving was much used. Malcolm took the samples he produced under Fred's guidance to Wilkes, where they took him through the various styles of engraving applied to guns and rifles. Fryer was working at the time with apprentices on day release from both Purdey and Holland factories, that included Ken Hunt, Geoffrey Casbard and Danny O'Brien.

It would have been hard to work in Beak Street without also getting an appreciation of fine guns, and Malcolm's artist's eye soon developed a lasting appreciation of the elegance of best guns, especially those of the late Victorian era. Malcolm has always had a particular fondness for the line, quality and individuality of the guns made by Dougall, some of which were, of course, made by John's grandfather, and examples of which were periodically in the workshop. Working in the shop in the early1960s gave Malcolm a close up view of all four members of the Wilkes family at work and his stories of them now are a unique record. Both John and Tom were close to forty and must have been wanting more say in the running of the firm. But they were kept at the bench with Jack and Uncle Tom still very much in charge in the shop downstairs. Malcolm remembers frequent arguments being a feature of the working environment, and these were not confined to disputes between generations. Malcom was present on the day when nearly all the firm's pre-1928 registers, including those of the Dougall business, were accidentally consigned to the council refuse collection. Malcolm remembers Uncle Tom going into a deep depression after this. The mistake was his, and the ledgers were more important to him than to any of the other members of the family.

Another disagreement surfaced when Uncle Tom was overheard telling a potential customer in the shop that the firm no longer made new guns for retail customers, only working for the trade. It was only then that the younger generation in the workshop realised why there were so few orders for new guns. Why Tom would have done this was never clear, perhaps because he felt they had more than enough work already, or possibly because he didn't want the extra discussions that retail customers expected. Although boxlocks were offered by several London makers in the 1960s, almost all of these were made up and finished in Birmingham, either by Webley & Scott or by the smaller makers still then trading. The Wilkes guns of this period were usually stocked and finished in Beak Street and were sought after because they allowed the customer closer contact with the making of their gun. So Uncle Tom was closing off viable business. There was a rift between the younger brothers and Uncle Tom after this that continued until he elected to retire from the partnership.

Despite this incident, Wilkes were making box lock guns throughout the period that Malcolm was working in the shop, and it was on some of these that his earliest engraving was undertaken. Sadly, the records of this period are rather sparse for reasons alluded to elsewhere, such that in one or two instances Malcolm's own photos of his work are the only way of tracing some of these guns. A number of guns and a few rifles from this period have also come up for sale recently allowing a rather belated opportunity to fill in some of the gaps in the records.

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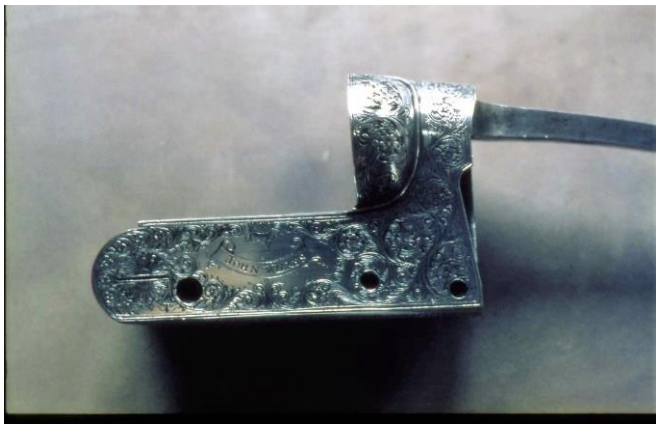

One of the first guns Malcolm engraved for Wilkes in the mid-60s. Note the unusual design even for such a simple pattern.

Malcom worked on bolt action rifles during his first year of engraving work at the Central School. Within another six months he had completed his first gun for Wilkes. From Malcolm's records, we know it was 15059, but there is no record of it in the register or the ledgers, the number coming from a sequence that was unused pre-war It was a good quality, scalloped back, screwed pin boxlock. It was destined for a customer who was well known to Malcolm. It was covered in a novel design of rose and scroll, with the name in a cartouche. Malcolm remembers being paid £13 for his work, a sum that made him feel part of the team, even though it was somewhat less than would have been paid to more established engravers at the time. And probably no more as a proportion of the sale price of the gun than would have been paid to Kell thirty years previously for engraving a boxlock of similar quality.

From the outset of his training Malcolm was set on exploiting his artistic talents as a designer, rather than merely working to execute the designs of others. His entire career has served to vindicate that choice, but right from the outset his tutors made it clear that in the craft he had chosen there was no career to be had that was confined to design, the artist had to be able to execute those designs as well. So Malcolm developed skills in working with ferrous and non-ferrous metals, in gold and silver and other precious metals and in making jewellery, and of course in engraving in the various styles that are found on guns.

At Wilkes, where Malcolm had a bench in the workshop, the majority of the work was engraving standard rose and scroll patterns on new box locks, a useful training exercise but not one that allowed much opportunity for Malcolm to demonstrate his flair for design. Even with these relatively standard designs, he never missed an opportunity for a small spark of originality, the occasional miniature vignette sometimes appearing in an out of the way place on a gun. The proprietors, for whom Kell's style and approach was still the benchmark, were not always delighted to find these on the finished gun.

By the late 1960s Wilkes had been making up rifles for others for over 20 years, but as this business declined with the fortunes of their trade customers, they took a number of commissions from their own retail customers for high quality bolt rifles, with varying degrees of embellishment. Some of these provided Malcolm with an opportunity to show off his talents. One such was when a South American customer ordered a best quality bolt action rifle, with full and elaborate engraving and full "De Luxe" finish. Rifles like this one allowed Malcolm's creative talents far more freedom and he took full advantage of this, each of the small and separated surfaces of the Mauser action being used as a different canvas.

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This 7 mm de luxe rifle 43095 was copiously engraved by Malcolm in 1967 on all surfaces with a gold inlaid kudu on the coverplate It was sold to a South American customer for £350.

In 1969, a year after Jack Wilkes' death, and much to the alarm of John, his “apprentice master”, Malcolm made the life changing decision of moving away from London; to Scotland, the country that has been his home ever since. His first base there was a former railway station at Crathes, about ten miles west of Aberdeen. It was here that he undertook the majority of his work for Wilkes. His departure caused a certain amount of disappointment in the firm in that they had probably nursed hopes of having Malcolm as a captive engraver in the shop, but these were probably never realistic. So Wilkes had to adjust their dealings to rely on the post and the occasional face to face encounter with Malcolm on his visits to London. Malcolm has since moved to a home and purpose built workshop a little further south in Perthshire.

Two views of Malcolm’s first Scottish workshop at the former Crathes Station. Left, working on a sidelock action at the bench and above, the outside showing the railway platform.

A further opportunity for Malcolm to demonstrate his creative flair came when Wilkes bought from a dealer in early 1971 a single barrel side lock trap gun, with a large dummy lock plate to match the working one, a heavy octagonal breech barrel with ventilated rib, and bearing the name of Ogden Smiths & Hussey. Such guns were widely advertised between the wars; they were in all the leading maker's catalogues, but the infrequency with which they appear on the second-hand market today suggests that there was less success at actually marketing them than the catalogues would imply. Wilkes had in the shop actions and barrels for making these guns up but don't appear ever to have done so, at least not according to the surviving records. The gun in question,

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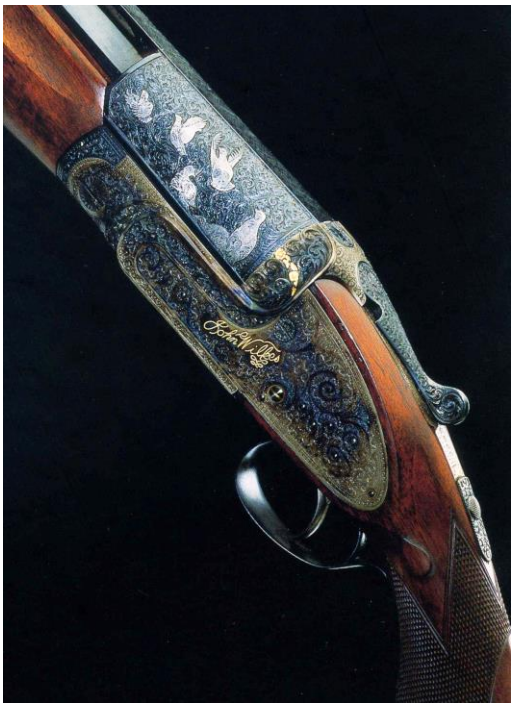
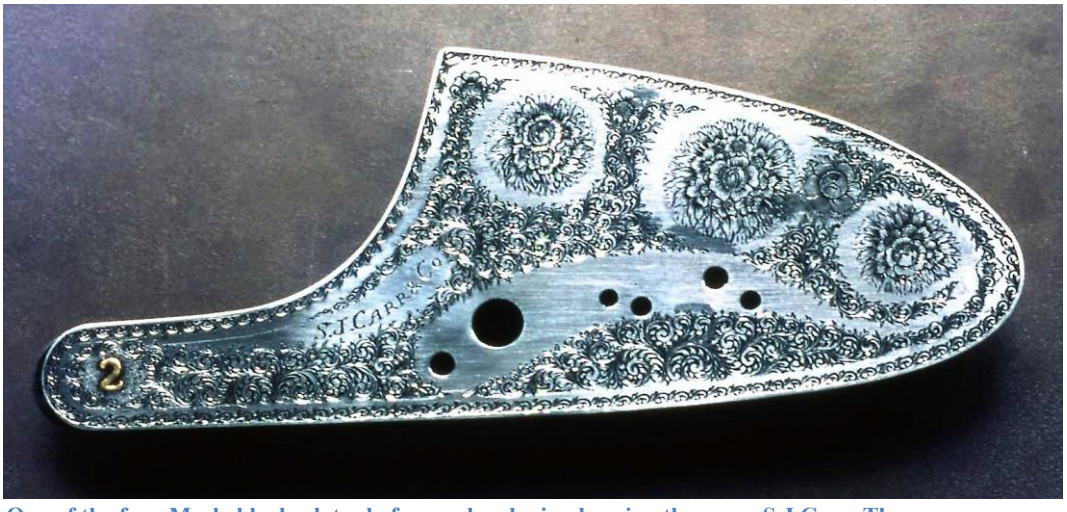
like many others sold in London, was made up in the Birmingham trade. It was a 12-bore built on an 8-bore action, so had plenty of surface to engrave.



The single barrel sidelock trap gun as it left Malcolm's workshop, and as it appeared in the Christie's catalogue fully finished.

Tom decided to anneal the action and to let Malcolm chisel out most of the existing border and completely re-engrave it, together with the barrel, in whatever style he wanted. In the event Malcolm chose to use the full spectrum of engraving styles, carving on the fences and lever, tentacles of fine scroll on the locks, platinum inlay of John Wilkes' signature on the bar, with their name and address, and game birds against a deep background on the octagonal breech end of the barrel. The gun was eventually sold at auction, but the lack of clarity over its provenance overshadowed it. At any time prior to the 1960s it would have been normal trade practice for a maker who had rebuilt a gun to this extent to put his name on it if he wished to, but this practice had been overtaken by legal changes by the time this gun appeared for sale. It is now in a private collection.



One of the four Merkel lock-plates before re-hardening bearing the name S.J Carr. These were engraved in 1967 whilst Malcolm was still at the Royal College of Art.

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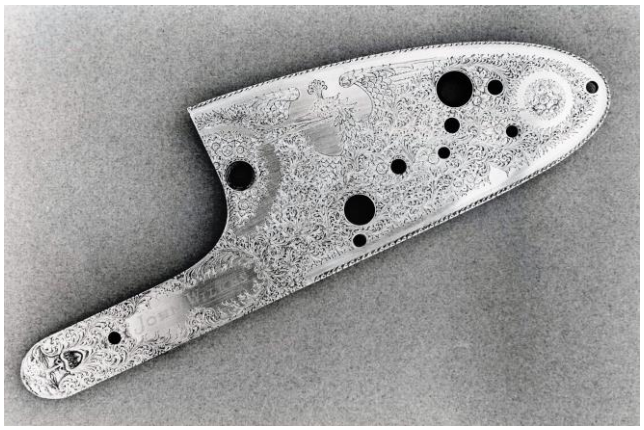
After Malcolm's move to Scotland, Wilkes continued to send him, through the early seventies, small but relatively standard engraving jobs that did little to exploit his creative flair.



Two details from the swan pair. The swan fences and the eye behind the top lever on the left, and the unhardened lock plate with a grotesque mask at the end of the bar, and a mythical bird incorporated in the scrollwork. Invisible in this picture is a prominent gold line around the curve of the plate.

But in the mid-1970s Wilkes took an order from good customer for a pair of 12 bore guns on which Malcolm was allowed to use his discretion as to the style of engraving. This pair (15122 and 15123) were engraved in the fine rose and scroll style but had mythical birds on the lock plates where the main bouquets would normally be, bold gold lines around the plates themselves, grotesque masks at the ends of the lock plate bars, and a swan's head and neck on each of the fences. The undersides of the bars had heavier scroll engraving. When Malcom returned them freshly engraved to the shop, Tom, who was never one to over praise the creative work of others even if he liked it, remarked that "you don't shoot swans." To which Malcolm pointed out that you don't shoot rose and scroll either.

In 1978 Malcolm took on the engraving of the first of six Webley & Scott 20 bore boxlocks that had been bought in as barrelled actions. This gun, 15126, was filed with a scroll back action and engraved by Malcom with fine rose and scroll, with the Wilkes name in silver, and was sold to its customer in 1979. Following this came a commission from the customer of the swan fenced guns to engrave a garniture of four side lock guns (a pair of 20 bores, a 28 bore and a .410), this time with a more conventional Purdey pattern rose and scroll design, but with oak leaf carved fences These were completed in the early eighties and sold to their customer in 1985. At about the same time, Wilkes took a commission from another regular customer for a pair of 12 bore guns, which the customer wanted

Two 12 bores from the set four standard Purdey pattern guns that were the last Wilkes guns that Malcolm engraved in the early 1980s.

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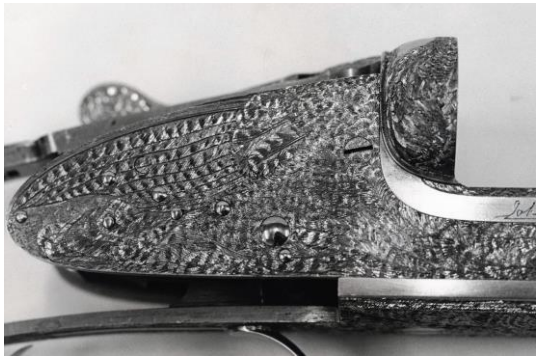
engraved in the Purdey style by Malcolm. The negotiation of a price for this work proved difficult. At the time, Wilkes usually included the cost of standard engraving in the price of the gun, so Tom was keen to keep the price he paid to the engraver as low as possible. At the same time, Malcolm's reputation as an artist was flourishing, and with it rose the price he could get for his creative work. But executing standard patterns of engraving on guns was not giving an opportunity for him to demonstrate his talent to the full. In the case of this particular customer, the problem was exacerbated by an order immediately afterwards for two more guns, a 20 bore and a 28 bore, which the customer wanted engraved to match for the same price. These were to be the last guns Malcolm engraved for John Wilkes for many years.

In the late 1970s Malcolm started to develop designs that involved covering all the external metal surfaces of a gun with engraving that depicted the anatomy of a particular species, the various surfaces of the gun and its furniture providing different shaped and sized canvasses for different views of the animal in intimate detail. This was at a time when Malcolm was becoming increasingly well known for his work outside the gun trade.



Detail of the finished Woodcock gun as it appeared in Sotheby's catalogue, above, and left in Malcolm's workshop prior to hardening.

Sotheby's catalogue picture of the Woodcock Gun.

In 1979, Tom had sold Malcom a 12-bore side lock ejector No 15164, stocked and in the white. The sale price was £3,700. This was a standard gun although fitted with an exceptional stock. Tom was doing Malcolm few favours at that price; at around this time he was selling similar guns, fully finished to retail customers for £5,000. Over the year or two, Malcolm designed and then engraved this gun in a style based on the anatomy of a woodcock, finally fitting it into a fine case with a full set of similarly decorated, highest quality accessories. The John Wilkes name is finely inlaid on the bar using a copy of John's signature. For familiar reasons related to Wilkes' record keeping, the Woodcock Gun was finished bearing the number 15124, duplicating the number of one of the garniture of guns that were going through Malcolm's workshop at the same time.

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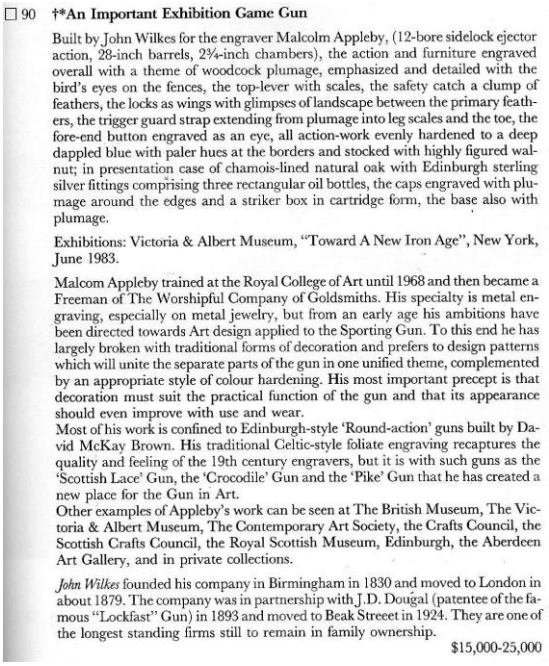
Sotheby's took on the sale of the gun and placed it in an auction that was held in Houston in November 1984. The catalogue entry is fascinating because it makes almost no mention of the gun's shooting characteristics. Only bore size, barrel length and chamber length are catalogued, all the other usual particulars are omitted, but the catalogue is quite detailed in its description of the Woodcock Gun as a work of art. It is clear Sotheby's were intent on selling it as such, rather than as a gun. The sale realised after commission and charges about £12,000, more than twice the price that Wilkes were asking from retail customers at the time. This was high enough for Tom to suggest afterwards that Malcolm might give the firm a share of the profit, an offer that was declined by Malcolm, who pointed out the price he had paid Wilkes was "water under the bridge".



☐ 90 †*An Important Exhibition Game Gun

Built by John Wilkes for the engraver Malcolm Appleby, (12-bore sidelock ejector action, 28-inch barrels, 2¾-inch chambers), the action and furniture engraved overall with a theme of woodcock plumage, emphasized and detailed with the bird's eyes on the fences, the top-lever with scales, the safety catch a clump of feathers, the locks as wings with glimpses of landscape between the primary feathers, the trigger guard strap extending from plumage into leg scales and the toe, the fore-end button engraved as an eye, all action-work evenly hardened to a deep dappled blue with paler hues at the borders and stocked with highly figured walnut; in presentation case of chamois-lined natural oak with Edinburgh sterling silver fittings comprising three rectangular oil bottles, the caps engraved with plumage around the edges and a striker box in cartridge form, the base also with plumage.

Exhibitions: Victoria & Albert Museum, "Toward A New Iron Age", New York, June 1983.

Malcom Appleby trained at the Royal College of Art until 1968 and then became a Freeman of The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths. His specialty is metal engraving, especially on metal jewelry, but from an early age his ambitions have been directed towards Art design applied to the Sporting Gun. To this end he has largely broken with traditional forms of decoration and prefers to design patterns which will unite the separate parts of the gun in one unified theme, complemented by an appropriate style of colour hardening. His most important precept is that decoration must suit the practical function of the gun and that its appearance should even improve with use and wear.
Most of his work is confined to Edinburgh-style 'Round-action' guns built by David McKay Brown. His traditional Celtic-style foliate engraving recaptures the quality and feeling of the 19th century engravers, but it is with such guns as the 'Scottish Lace' Gun, the 'Crocodile' Gun and the 'Pike' Gun that he has created a new place for the Gun in Art.
Other examples of Appleby's work can be seen at The British Museum, The Victoria & Albert Museum, The Contemporary Art Society, the Crafts Council, the Scottish Crafts Council, the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, the Aberdeen Art Gallery, and in private collections.

John Wilkes founded his company in Birmingham in 1830 and moved to London in about 1879. The company was in partnership with J.D. Dougal (patentee of the famous "Lockfast" Gun) in 1893 and moved to Beak Streeet in 1924. They are one of the longest standing firms still to remain in family ownership.

$15,000-25,000

Sotheby's unusual catalogue description of the gun, missing much of the detail that anyone interested in shooting the gun would want to know.

Shortly after this, two further examples of the style were applied to two round-action guns made by David McKay Brown; the Crocodile Gun and the Pike Gun; both appearing in the early 1980s to critical acclaim. The former was sold initially for £16,000, and subsequently resold at auction in 2009 for three times that amount.

The tensions in the relationship that surrounded these last few guns that Malcolm engraved for Wilkes are symptomatic of a difference of view between the two. Tom particularly still saw engraving as a necessary ornamentation of his guns. It should be well executed to established patterns, and at a predictable and affordable cost within the overall price of a gun. Basically, the view he took in the 1970s of the engravers then working was the same his father had taken of Kell and his contemporaries fifty years previously. Malcolm on the other hand was well on his way to becoming an established and sought after artist who expected his work to attract a growing premium for its artistic merit. These two views were irreconcilable, but the friendship with the brothers was lifelong; Malcolm always taking an opportunity to visit the shop when he was in London.

Malcolm was to go on building his reputation as a leading artist in metal, his work commanding prices to match his reputation. This included a regular supply of gun engraving commissions, but for many years, none of these were from Wilkes. John and Tom did change their approach to engraving in the light of this and other experience. They still decorated a good proportion of their output of best guns in the next 25 years with standard rose and scroll engraving, but a growing proportion of their new production was more elaborately and more creatively engraved. In these cases, the cost of the engraving was agreed separately from the cost of the gun, on occasion the customer contracting directly with the engraver for the designs and ornamentation that were wanted.

But the story of Malcolm Appleby's association with John Wilkes didn't quite finish in the early 1980s. When the shop closed there was one gun, a .410 side lock ejector built on a perfectly scaled down action, proved in 2002, that was unsold, and stocked and in the white in the workshop. After the brother's deaths in 2009 and 2010, Malcolm bought this gun from the family

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and finished it as only he can, as the Dragonfly Gun. Details are in the epilogue at the end of this book.

New Retail Customers

New guns were however but a small part of Wilkes retail business after the war. The immediate post war years seemed to generate a flurry of guns being brought in for sale, and Mr Wilkes usually obliged, particularly for those bearing his name. The normal practice was that he would buy the guns outright and re-sell them, seldom more than a month or two separating the sale and purchase. The margins on these transactions were quite high, often approaching 100%, but Wilkes was standing behind any used gun they sold, providing a warranty, although not a written one. As Tom would say years later "if something goes wrong they expect you to fix it and, I'll tell you something else, they don't expect to pay." Handled in this way, these sales contributed directly to retail turnover, but they tied up the firm's capital.

In the 1950s Wilkes had a rather exclusive set of retail customers, who had built up a relationship with the firm over periods of years. These were mostly active sportsmen who made hard use of their guns and most of them knew they needed to be treated with care and have correspondingly frequent maintenance. This generated a steady stream of welcome repeat business for Wilkes. But there was apparently a minority that did not make this link. John would sometimes remark at the amount of unnecessary damage that some people could do to guns, particularly by failing to hook the barrels onto the cross pin squarely and completely when assembling the gun from the case, and damaging either the sides or the underneath of the front lump in the process. When given the opportunity, he would make a point of showing a customer how to put a gun together without inflicting damage. He also used to bemoan the amount of dirt that was allowed to accumulate in the action slots, on the flats or under the extractors, all excellent ways of encouraging a gun to shoot loose. In one case I can remember him pointing out a gun where so much dirt had accumulated in the front action slot that the lump in closing had pushed a bulge in the bottom of the action. John believed that it was a common fallacy that best guns would never wear out; if heavily enough used and badly enough treated in the field, they could and did wear out. This minority of Wilkes customers would bring back guns year after year expecting the annual maintenance to somehow halt this decline caused in large part by their own neglect.

By the early 1960s there was a discernible increase in the retail footfall through the shop. Part of this was caused by the Swinging Sixties, the change of use for parts of Soho that would bring far more tourists and casual shoppers into the area. Carnaby Street which was the site of the earliest fashion boutiques was barely 100 yards from the shop. One effect that this had on Wilkes business was to present opportunities to sell cartridge bags and belts and game bags as fashion accessories to passers-by looking for Carnaby Street, but it also increased the amount of passing trade generally. Wilkes' ledger keeping required all items sold to be accompanied by an invoice. The normal practice was for these to be made out to a named customer, but for casual business, names like A. Caller, A. Italian or A. Constable are found with increasing frequency. These walk-in customers didn't buy much individually but they did contribute to the increasing the number of customers in the shop.

A different and more significant effect was that, with the decline in the gun trade in the capital, shooters who needed their guns maintained were being engaged in many of the West End gunmakers by front shop men who were often relatively inexperienced. The work itself was being sent out, often up to Birmingham, or even round to 79 Beak Street. Wilkes was possibly the only shop where a customer with a gun that needed repair could be sure they could talk to the person

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who would actually do the work. G.L.Carlisle, who was a regular contributor to the Shooting Times, was a retail customer of Wilkes in the 1960s and Gough Thomas would visit when researching articles for the same magazine, so the survival of Wilkes business and the unique nature of the work being done in the shop started to be referenced in the press. As the decade progressed and many of the other shops closed, merged or retreated into obscure basements, this aspect of the attractiveness of Wilkes to retail customers increased.

The 1960s saw the introduction of some significant new customers to Wilkes. In particular, a Californian, who was to become a regular customer over the next forty years, had Wilkes restock and refurbish a pair of Purdeys in 1966, a job they did for £200. This customer in due course was to introduce a number of his compatriots who would collectively do much to support the Wilkes business in the 1970s and beyond. A Uruguayan customer ordered two new bolt rifles from Wilkes, a .338 rifle number 43094, sold for £215 in October 1965, followed by 43095, a 7mm sold two years later for £350. In the same year this client also bought a second-hand pair of Holland Royals from Wilkes for £900 and then had them restocked and refurbished for another £210.

With new guns everywhere in rather short supply, the market for second-hand guns and rifles became increasingly buoyant during the sixties. With the professional dealers like Vaughan a fading memory, most London gunmakers had developed some trade in used specimens. But there were also a growing number of itinerant dealers who made a living by a buying and selling guns. Many of these had no retail outlet and no means for undertaking anything more than rudimentary repairs; their business was buying and selling to the trade. The main London gun auctions of the period were held monthly by Knight, Frank and Rutley from sale rooms in Hanover Square in Mayfair. Although these sales had a small number of lots consigned by private individuals or their executors, they were primarily trade events where dealers could pick up or dispose of stock. Many of these dealers would be regular visitors to Wilkes, and became customers of theirs. They weren't always entirely welcome, sometimes they could supply a gun that Wilkes needed or take something for which they wouldn't otherwise find a market, but their overall effect was to dilute margins on second-hand firearms and this was to be an important part of Wilkes's business in the 1960s and beyond. Whilst Jack held a fairly intemperate view of these dealers; John and Tom needed to be and were more pragmatic.

Philip Goodship

In July 1957 Mr H. Goodship, then in the employ of Garrard's the jewellers, wrote to Jack enquiring about opportunities for his sixteen-year-old son, Philip, to train as a gunmaker. There is nothing on file to show how Jack dealt with this enquiry, but the following year Philip started an apprenticeship at Atkin, Grant, & Lang, where Ebenezer Hands was to train him as a stocker. Masters[23] describes some subsequent events. When Goodship was nearing the end of his apprenticeship, his wife of only a few months wrote to the Shooting Times to complain about the meagre wages paid to apprentices in the trade. Masters mentions that this caused some rancour amongst the directors of the company, but she had a point. In 1957 the economy had been sufficiently buoyant for the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan to pronounce that "most of our people have never had it so good". Young people had growing expectations, and that included those entering the gun trade, a trade which was risking sowing the seeds of its own destruction by its addiction to Victorian remuneration practices. Perhaps not surprisingly when Goodship finished his apprenticeship in 1963, the year after Hands' death, he was keen to leave Atkin, Grant & Lang, and when he did so, he started doing work for Wilkes.

Philip worked as Wilkes' stocker for many years, the early ones mainly in the shop, later in the 1970s doing the work at his home. He doesn't appear to have been on payroll, always being paid by the job, and he took on work for others as well. He was a very careful worker, always heading

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his stocks up with great precision, and always getting an elegant line from the head of the stock, through the points and into the hand. Left to his own devices he was quite slow, usually taking between ten days and two weeks to stock a sidelock, a job Dickie Bolter used to do in three days, but his stocks always turned out looking exactly right. He was one of the first to try re-stocking guns with partly machined blanks made on copying machines. He was distinctly unenthusiastic and preferred cutting the stocks from the block as he felt it gave much more room to adjust the fit of the action.

When he was trained, Hands taught him the practice of boring stocks very extensively as a routine step to get the right balance to the finished gun, often replacing some of the weight removed with lead to move the balance point of the gun rearwards. Following the drilling of holes with various sizes of auger bits this involved using long bladed gouges to hollow out the stock to leave an oval sectioned cavity. Phil used to talk of going on doing this until the gouges hit the guard screws, and of the need to leave wooden bridges across the hollowed out interior to prevent the stock collapsing in use. By the 1970s, when time was at a premium, boring became reserved for only those stocks that were unusually dense and was then confined to the drilling of holes. He happily gave away his gouges once he realised the days of hollowing were over. He also loathed chequering and was more than relieved to find that at 79 Beak Street, Tom expected to do that. Philip went on stocking for the firm for many years but contracted a debilitating chronic disease which gradually made work more and more difficult. He died a few months after Tom.

The Last of His Generation

Jack and Uncle Tom carried on working in the shop well into the 1960s, with the two older men still very much in charge, and the younger John and Tom, both by then around forty, still employees. Jack was still regarded as the master man able to turn his hand to any job that came in. Pictures of him at the time show him sometimes in a white coat, always wearing a collar and tie and usually a waistcoat, and often carrying a cigarette. In 1966 he reached 80 years of age. John told a story that he described as the first time he realised how much his father was slowing down; in particular, his eyesight was fading.

The back shop in the mid-1960s. Jack seated with George Strachan and Tom to the left and their shop man at the time and John to the right.

In the mid-sixties Holland & Holland were sending round second-hand guns in batches for repair or refurbishment prior to re-sale. The latest batch was sitting in the shop, and Jack noticed one of them had a split fore-end wood, so he took it upstairs and restocked the fore-end. After he had finished John had cause to pick the gun up, and noticed what had gone wrong. The gun had been fired with an obstruction in the barrel. This had caused a ring bulge to form ahead of the chamber and it was this that had split the fore-end wood. John said the bulge was so pronounced that you could both see it, and feel it as you ran your hand up the barrel. Jack had been unable to see the bulge and had stocked the new fore-end wood around it. Jack had been blind in one eye since his

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early days in the shop – a practical joke by his fellow apprentices that involved loading some black powder in his pipe under the tobacco had gone seriously wrong. He had overcome this disability to be one of the leading craftsmen of his generation. The incident with the fore-end was the first time that John realised the extent to which his father was losing his sight in his good eye. It also serves as a quite extraordinary testament to the old man's skill that he did the re-stocking without being able to see properly what he was doing. The old wood was hastily put back, the label was marked to indicate the barrels were damaged beyond repair and the gun was sent back to Holland's, leaving John to reflect that thereafter his father would probably not be much help to them in the workshop thereafter.

Telephone: 01-437 6539

JOHN WILKES

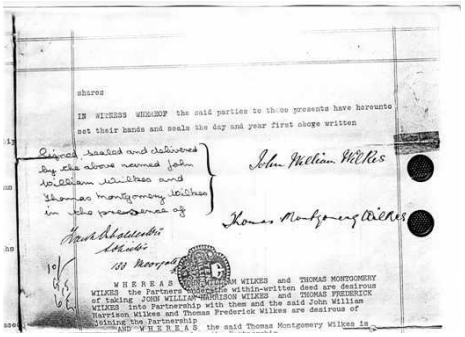
J. W. WILKES J. W. H. WILKES T. F. WILKES

Gun and Rifle Makers

Established 1880

Fitting and Coaching at Private Grounds

The new letterhead used for only a few months in 1967/8.


shares

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the said parties to these presents have hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year first above written

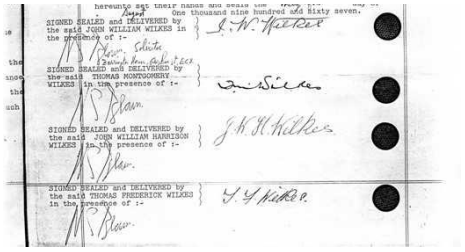
Signed sealed and delivered by the above named John William Wilkes and Thomas Montgomery Wilkes in the presence of

John William Wilkes

Thomas Montgomery Wilkes

WHEREAS JOHN WILLIAM WILKES and THOMAS MONTGOMERY WILKES the Partners within-written deed are desirous of taking JOHN WILLIAM HARRISON WILKES and THOMAS FREDERICK WILKES into Partnership with them and the said John William Harrison Wilkes and Thomas Frederick Wilkes are desirous of joining the Partnership AND WHEREAS the said Thomas Montgomery Wilkes is

The addendum to the partnership agreement of 1928 whereby Uncle Tom resigned and John and Tom became partners.


hereunto set their hands and seals the day and year first above written

SIGNED SEALED and DELIVERED by the said JOHN WILLIAM WILKES in the presence of :-

SIGNED SEALED and DELIVERED by the said THOMAS MONTGOMERY WILKES in the presence of :-

SIGNED SEALED and DELIVERED by the said JOHN WILLIAM HARRISON WILKES in the presence of :-

SIGNED SEALED and DELIVERED by the said THOMAS FREDERICK WILKES in the presence of :-

In the late summer of 1967, Jack's wife Grace, the mother of John and Tom, died at the age of 74. At the same time, Uncle Tom, Thomas Montgomery Wilkes, decided that he wanted to retire from the business, so with effect from the end of the firm's 1967 financial year on 31st August, a new partnership agreement was signed that introduced Jack's two sons, John William Harrison Wilkes and Thomas Frederick Wilkes as equal partners with their father in the John Wilkes business. This was achieved in practice by an addendum to the original 1928 partnership agreement. New notepaper that reflected the change of names in the partnership was printed and the trading name of the firm was re-registered to show Jack and his two sons as owners of the business.

Uncle Tom carried on working for a few weeks after resigning his partnership; his last entries in the invoice ledger were on 20th September 1967. He was killed in an incident on the London Underground that same month, aged 77. With his departure, the firm lost its scribe, the meticulous but obsessive recorder of all its business of the previous forty years. The new partners attempted to carry on keeping records in the same style, but they would become increasingly ragged, sometimes illegible and occasionally incomplete within a few months. In February 1968, the firm had to write to one of its long-standing customers to apologise for a misunderstanding over an outstanding invoice, attributing the mistake to the fact that Uncle Tom was no longer there to look after the record keeping.

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Jack Wilkes in the front shop in the 1960s.

The distressing events of the second half of 1967 were to get worse early the following year when Jack, John William Wilkes, died at the age of 82 of leukaemia. His death left John and Tom, who had been partners for less than six months, now in charge of the business. When Jack had succeeded from his own father in 1927, he did so after effectively running the business since his return from Birmingham four years earlier. When John and Tom succeeded from Jack, he had been in charge until just before his death. The new partners had much to learn very quickly. Even ten years after the event John could not talk about his father's last days in the shop without showing so much emotion that the listener would wish they hadn't raised the subject.

Of our rather arbitrarily defined generation of craftsmen that have provided a recurrent theme through the story of John Wilkes so far, Jack, at the time of his death, was the last still to be working, and one of the last still to be alive. The oldest in that group was George Mealey who, being born in 1868 was almost eighteen years older than Jack. He outlived them all, dying in Haringey in east London in 1971 at the age of 103.

When the brothers' father and uncle succeeded to the business forty years previously, the national economy was in crisis, and that crisis had presented the gun trade with many difficulties. In the late sixties, the economy was certainly struggling and would get worse, but the gun trade was heading into a cavernous crisis largely of its own making, and one from which few firms would survive unchanged. Before tracing the story of the next 35 years of the John Wilkes business, it is perhaps helpful to look at this crisis and the way it unfolded, because it sets the scene against which John and Tom Wilkes would have to run their partnership.

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Chapter 11 – Gun Making Again 1968 - 2003

The Trade in Crisis - 1970s

Chapter 1 described in outline the problems that befell the gun trade in the 1970s. By the early 1970s wage led inflation in the UK economy, which had been a concern since the late 1950s and a significant driving force throughout the 1960s, had reached epidemic proportions. It peaked at 26.9% in 1975, a year in which, despite this escalation in prices, the economy still managed to shrink. The past failures of the few significant gunmaking employers to do enough to recruit young people to replace an ageing workforce meant that delivery times lengthened, and the sudden surge in costs of both material and labour pushed manufacturing costs sharply upwards. Cost saving measures in the making of best guns, such as reducing the coverage of engraving, using plainer wood or reducing the time spent on finishing, meant that some of the guns made in this period did not stand up to visual comparison with their pre-war counterparts, even if their underlying mechanics were sound. There was a story of an American customer walking into to collect a new pair of guns from one of the leading London makers after a three-year wait, taking one look at them lying in their case and walking out without them.

It would be wrong to give the impression that all guns made in London in this difficult period were of indifferent quality. Throughout their history the makers of best guns had always offered special finishes, engraving, embellishment or extra quality wood. Purdey in particular had been concentrating on these options since the engraver Ken Hunt had joined them in the 1950s after serving his apprenticeship with Kell. The London auction record price for side-by-side guns was held for 25 years by a pair of Purdey guns exquisitely engraved and gold embellished by Ken Hunt and delivered to their customer in the early 1970s. But it was Holland & Holland who decided to use exceptional engraving as a means of changing the model for their gunmaking business.

In the late 1960s Malcolm Lyell realised that, whilst they were struggling to sell their best standard guns at prices that made a sufficient profit, if they produced guns that were ostensibly celebrations of extremely fine craftsmanship, they could attract a premium price that would justify the extra cost in their manufacture. Part of the success in doing this depended on having a global market for London made guns, a market which Lyell had spent much of the 1960s developing. This was a significant departure from the pre-war era where fine guns were deliberately made with muted ornamentation, the understatement of the decoration adding to their appeal. Holland produced guns and rifles in unusual garnitures, such as a collection of five guns with similar elaborate engraving and matching fine stocks in different bore sizes. Guns and rifles in such groupings as these would be of limited use in the field. They were made first and foremost as collector's items, albeit collector's items which could still be used, whereas the guns from the thirties had been made primarily to be used.

A gunmaker who had left school in the early sixties tells a story that speaks volumes about the trade. On leaving school he wrote to all the London gunmakers he could identify asking about opportunities to train. He got but one reply, and that was from Holland & Holland. Mr Lyell played an important part in addressing a chronic weakness of the trade, the shortage of skilled men. He launched a vigorous programme of recruitment and training designed to appeal to the youth of the sixties. Over time this established the Holland factory as a source of younger talent entering the trade. Whilst some other firms have now followed the same course, it is arguable that without Holland's lead the trade would have been starved of skilled men.

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The inflationary pressure put all the gunmaking firms under severe financial strain. They had been used to their costs being stable and predictable but by 1970 this was no longer the case. Prices shot upwards. By the start of the 1970s, there were only Purdey, Holland and, to a smaller extent, Boss left making in any volume in London. In the third volume of his book, Nigel Brown[9] gives an extensive collation of list prices over time, including those of Purdey's side by side gun. There is no particular reason for singling out Purdey other than the comprehensive collection of pricing data that exists for them. To summarise Brown's tabulation at five year intervals starting in 1965 when the standard gun cost twice its post war price, we have the following data showing the subsequent inflation over time.

Year	Price	Year	Price
1965	£800	1985	£15,000
1970	£1,600	1990	£23,000
1975	£4,000	1995	£28,750
1980	£9,500	2000	£40,100

Purdey's production volumes, according to Dallas[16], were pretty much flat during this period, so these prices are a reasonable reflection of the increasing manufacturing costs and their associated overheads. It is worth noting that had their prices risen during this period in line with retail prices generally, the standard gun would have cost under a quarter of its list price in 2000. So in the last 35 years of the century handmade guns became relatively very much more expensive than they had been previously.

These prices relate to the standard gun with the standard pattern of engraving. Special engraving and exhibition grade wood cost thousands extra, this premium increasing during the period. Compare this to the 1930s when Kell would charge perhaps five or ten pounds extra for special engraving and an exceptional piece of wood would add about three pounds to the cost of stocking the gun, so the manufacturing costs of an "extra finish" best gun might go up from £65 to £80.

The rise in the price of new guns, the long lead times for their delivery, and the anxiety about quality were all factors that boosted the second-hand market. For a century or so it had been accepted practice that second-hand guns would command prices that were a fraction of the new price, but as the realisation dawned that the new price was heading upwards very rapidly, perhaps doubling every five years, and that second-hand guns from pre-war were immediately available and of demonstrably high quality, many of them already having delivered 35 years' service or more, the prices commanded by second-hand guns started to inflate quickly, and faster than the price of new guns. Second hand Purdey and Boss sidelocks which were fetching £600-£800 at auction in 1970 were fetching £2000 - £3000 by 1975.

John Wilkes was by no means immune from the woes besetting the wider gun trade. Their big trade customers Jeffery, Westley Richards and Greener had all closed their independent London businesses and Rigby was up for sale. The ultimate gunmaking conglomerate, Churchill, Atkin, Grant & Lang was in a protracted process of closing down, taking with it the half dozen or so other makers that appeared in the small print on their notepaper. The dealers with retail shops had all gone, Cogswell & Harrison was going and the largest of the Birmingham makers, the stalwart Webley & Scott were running down their production. Also in Birmingham the late sixties had seen the demolition of most of the gunmaking quarter to make way for the Inner Ring Road development, and with it had gone almost all the primitive but affordable workshops. The trade there would never recover.

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It is small wonder that Tom Wilkes would tell anyone who wanted to listen that the trade was finished in the early 1970s. Barrel Tubes were difficult to get, there was just one source of action machinings, one source of locks, one hardener, good wood was almost unobtainable, and furniture and fore-end snaps had to be made up from investment castings. There were a few sources of stampings for some commonly used parts but nowhere near the variety that used to be available. Likewise, springs were available in just a few standard patterns. Many of the supporting trades that had made Soho such a viable location for a gunmaking business were gradually closing down along with the artisan workshops that were their *raison d'être*, all pushed out by the boutiques and service businesses that were moving into the suddenly fashionable Soho.

It is tempting to think, 40 years on, that Tom was wrong. The best gun trade now has several manufacturers, more indeed than in 1970, who are still producing fine looking guns and rifles that are mechanically very sophisticated and worthy successors to the earliest breech loaders of the 1870s. But these are produced by processes that rely on automated machine tools without which they could not be made. The trade that Tom had been brought up in and which had kept his father and grandfather in business was indeed gradually dying out. This was the trade in which guns and rifles were made largely by hand, cut out of blocks of iron with a hammer and chisel. This type of gunmaking was on its last legs, but those legs would keep John and Tom and a few others going for another 35 years.

The New Partners

John William Harrison Wilkes and Thomas Frederick Wilkes were very close in age, under eighteen months apart, but here the similarity ended – in most other respects they were quite dissimilar. Their differences caused some friction in the running of the business. In fact, their temperaments were almost entirely complementary, resulting in a partnership where their roles were different but each made up for the other's weaknesses. Not that they always recognised this, each at times becoming very irritated by the shortcomings of the other, but between them they were to run the business until they were ready to retire, which objectively must be seen as a successful outcome.

John and Tom in the workshop early 1970s. John is uncharacteristically unkempt in this picture.

John, the older brother, was bigger and stronger than Tom. In his twenties, he had single-handedly moved many of the machine tools into the basement and, right into his seventies, he remained the person to go to in the workshop if a job required sheer strength, like removing the hutts from a muzzle loader. In the days before they used Cattle's band-saw for cutting out the profile of bolt rifle stocks, John would set himself the challenge of making the long rip cut down the underside of the forepart to the grip in one go without stopping, no mean feat in 2½" wide walnut. On one particular stock, where more than one trial position of the template had been marked out, he carried straight on through the site of the proposed pistol grip. This mistake required a certain amount of splicing to correct, a story that John would recount when wanting to promote the strength of a well-made glued joint.

John was a meticulously careful but rather slow worker, sometimes taking hours to make up a tool to get a job done exactly right rather than doing it imperfectly with one from the box. Tom would say that John was the best stocker in the shop, it is just that he would take several weeks

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over a job that others could do in five days. As we shall see later, when he was in his sixties the firm was making up a great many cased and embellished handguns. Taking these straight from the box, John would spend hours filing up and polishing grips in ivory, horn or walnut, fitting these with silver ferrules, following this by finish filing and then polishing all the exposed surfaces of the actions. This kind of slow meticulous work was very much his forte and it never seemed to bore him or tempt him to take short cuts.

John at the front middle bench in the 1970s. This is a posed shot. In his vice is an unworked action machining which he is pretending to file. The photo shows an advantage of the leg vice, holding the work at a comfortable height whilst allowing access from three sides.

He was quite seriously dyslexic, a condition that would not have been recognised when he was educated and which he never discussed. He avoided situations in the shop where he had to write as far as he could, but circumstances sometimes meant that he had to make out an invoice or take a message, sometimes with ambiguous results. He tried hard to leave most of the business decisions to his brother. If cornered into making one when Tom was absent, he was prone to buying things too expensively or selling them too cheaply.

He was throughout his life an avid seeker after knowledge, and was extraordinarily well informed for someone who must have found some difficulty in the process of acquiring that knowledge from books. In many ways John would have been more at home in his grandfather's day, he very much played the part of the gentleman gunmaker in the days of empire. He was meticulous about his appearance. His three-piece suits were made for him by tailors who had workshops nearby in Soho, and he persisted in wearing shirts with detachable collars long after these went out of fashion. Arriving in the workshop involved a certain amount of changing to get into the white coat, a process reversed at some length at the end of the working day, the Windsor knot on the tie requiring great attention. He held very conservative political views that would have been less eccentric a century or so earlier, and he would expand on these with very little prompting.

John's walk to work from Charing Cross station took him past the end of the Strand where it meets Trafalgar Square and where, in the 1970s, was situated an Army recruitment office. Passing this shortly after his 50th birthday John walked in and straight up to the desk where a sergeant was looking at papers. "I am fifty years old, able bodied and I want to serve my Queen and Country. What can you offer me?" asked John. Without looking up the sergeant gave a one-word reply "Retirement." One of the last records of the firm in Beak Street from the late 1990s was a video that was made by a local agency. In it John and Craig Whitsey do all the talking,

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Craig stalwartly tries to stick to the subject of how to make a gun, whilst John keeps deflecting the subject onto some of his political *bêtes noir*.

Most who knew John will remember him as a raconteur. He held in his memory a mine of stories about the trade and those that worked in it and enjoyed nothing more than keeping anyone who wanted to listen spellbound as he recounted these. While the research for this book has showed that one or two of these may have been embellished somewhat to improve their entertainment value, most were undoubtedly well founded. John was still telling them a few months before his death with exactly the same details that they had when I first heard them forty years earlier. Once John and Tom were running the business the previous taboos about customers coming up to the workshop were gradually abandoned, and as this happened the Beak Street shop assumed a role as a working museum. It was sometimes remarked, and only partly in jest, that many of the people who came upstairs were tourists rather than customers. John readily took on the role of keeping these people entertained, often telling them stories or expounding a particular political point, whilst carefully working away at whatever was on his bench at the time.

John was usually to be found in the shop. Although he knew most of his contemporaries in the London trade, he didn't go out of his way to cultivate relationships with other firms or outworkers. In this respect, and many others, he was very different from his brother. Tom was forever popping out or taking longer trips, visiting Holland or Boss, taking work to outworkers around the London suburbs or in Birmingham, walking round the corner to visit welders or engravers, always juggling several tasks at the same time. Networking came to him as second nature and he seldom told anyone in the shop where he was going, or why, or when he would be back.

Tom at the same bench around 1980, wearing his usual protective clothing.

Tom was one of the most gifted gunmakers of his generation. Phil Goodship used to say that he had never seen anyone like him. There was no job in the making of a gun, other than perhaps engraving, that Tom couldn't do. He had a particular genius for understanding the mechanics of a gun, and not just the standard mechanisms. A few moments looking at a malfunctioning example of any of the unusual proprietary mechanisms that had flourished either side of the turn of the century and Tom would know what was wrong, and very often have fixed it a few minutes later. Faulty single triggers and other chronic mechanical problem guns from all over the London trade seemed to gravitate to Tom's bench, from where they would usually emerge a day or so later working again.

Tom was a very fast worker, it was a good idea not to get too close to his bench when he was working on a problem gun, he would strip it and reassemble it very quickly, focussing only on the

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problem in hand and often colliding with anyone who tried to look over his shoulder to see what he was doing. This lack of awareness of where others were standing was sometimes a problem in the front shop. For a while in the 60s and 70s, the makers of the emulsifying and rather pungent Young's 303 barrel cleaner decided to sell it in aerosol spray cans. Tom would often spray a blast of this into the breech end of each barrel of a gun in front of the customer prior to putting the gun in its case to be taken away. More often than not this would be followed by a less than sincere "Oh, I'm sorry." as the customer disappeared in the haze of strongly smelling oil emerging from the other end of the barrels.

Tom was more than just a fixer of mechanical problems; he was one of those few people who knew instinctively how to get the shape and line of a gun right. There was an occasion where a .410 action that had been retrieved from the cellar was jointed into a pair of chopper lump barrels. It was only when getting the gun ready for stocking that Tom remembered why Jack had left it in the cellar. The action had been machined such that the back of the action was not square with the slot and the face. If filed up as it was, the fence on one side would be deeper than the other. Tom managed to fit the locks and file the action such that the skew was completely hidden, and the finished gun looked from the outside to be perfectly symmetrical.

Tom had a quite different approach to his appearance to John, the clothes in which he came to shop were his work clothes; sometimes he would don a white coat to protect them, sometimes not. Often the coat also served as a bolster to put under a stock whilst it was being chequered or as a convenient cloth on which to wipe down a pair of barrels, so Tom's coats were often not that white. His mercurial approach to work, coupled with the fact that he made quite a few trips out of the shop each day meant that he normally had several jobs on the go at once on his bench. Each time he came back to the shop, events would have pushed a different job to the top of his priority list. The bench at which he worked was never tidy and little parts of the guns he was currently working on were often placed on convenient ledges or in corners out of the way. He usually had an instinctive feel as to where he had left these, but this was not infallible. Helping Tom hunt for little parts was a routine entertainment in the workshop.

Tom handled all the finances for the business, did all the deals and made sure all the bills were paid. He was an astute businessman with an eye for a deal, although he sometimes came unstuck. He had very close relationships with all those in the trade on whom he relied to get work done, but there were occasional disagreements and tensions. There was one instance where something he did upset one the stockers to whom he was sending work. A matching trio of new guns came back stocked, but with all the inside work from all three guns stripped down in one plastic bag. It took Tom a whole week to sort out which part belonged to which gun.

Tom was quite a regular traveller to Europe to buy wood and to the United States where he spent time with the growing number of American customers. Sometimes when in the US he would be invited to work on guns whilst there. On one such trip he fitted a small number of recently made Wilkes side by side guns with steel inserts in the circle joint so that that they could be put back on the face in the same way as a Boss U&O.

Customers who wanted to do business with Wilkes soon realised they needed to talk to Tom rather than John, and this added to the pressure on his time when he was in the shop. Phone calls would come in to him the workshop where there was never anything to write on. Whilst the brothers were still smoking, the cigarette packet served as the ideal place to record such a message: it was small and always to hand. It had a downside in that it would be discarded within 24 hours along with any message it might bear, which may explain why customers found they had to call so repetitively. Both brothers gave up smoking in the 1980s. They were prompted to

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do so when a couple visiting from the US brought in 400 cigarettes as a gift on a Monday morning. When these had run out by the following Wednesday afternoon, both decided to give up, neither finding much difficulty in doing so. This made the workshop a somewhat safer place, albeit one in which recording telephone messages was now much more problematic.

It was perhaps inevitable that disagreements would occasionally surface between two brothers with such different strengths and temperaments, and indeed they did from time to time. They both made their unique contributions in their own way, and together these ensured the success of the business during their 35-year tenure. They also made a visit to Wilkes shop always a memorable and agreeable experience, always finding time for old acquaintances, new customers and never forgetting the tourists.

Other Maker's Guns

A subject that often came up in discussions with customers was the brothers' opinion of another maker's gun, either a particular one or of their production in general. They both adhered to an adage of their father's to look at the gun and not the name on it, and following that they were on record as being highly complimentary about guns from several of the lesser known or less fashionable makers. They could also be critical where they thought it was deserved, for example the earlier mentioned views of John about the appearance of some of Churchill's guns.

They had enormous regard for Boss, for the professionalism of the men in their factory and for the extraordinary uniformity they achieved in their manufacturing, but there were occasional criticisms even for them, such as their choice of non-standard sizes for parts or their practice of buying all their barrels at "Pigeon" weight, and then filing them down themselves. There was a time when even the best commercially available tubes had uneven wall thicknesses, and doubtless Boss were caught out by using a pair that were in places too thin, so to prevent this happening again they resolved forever thereafter to buy only the thickest available, a practice that continued long after other makers were quite happily using suppliers to remove most of the excess metal from the outside of their barrel tubes.

Jack had held the view, one that was followed by his sons, that a well-designed gun was one in which no spring was required to do more than one job. There was a rationale behind this as regulation and reliability became increasingly problematic if the same limb was being adjusted to do two roles. This meant that the Wilkes viewed a simple action, like the later Holland & Holland Royals that used a standard Rogers cocking action, more favourably than any of the Beesley or Baker patent self-openers, including the Purdey. Although Tom could get quite tetchy trying to regulate the pulls on a Purdey, there was always unstinting praise from both for the quality of the workmanship in their factory. The Purdey was just not their favourite gun. These views on the merits of the simplest sidelock and boxlock actions would set the direction for the guns that Wilkes were to make in the last years of the business. All their new production was confined to Rogers action sidelocks and A&D boxlocks. Where requested they would fit the Holland style of assisted opener, a mechanism that was activated by its own spring.

Records 1967-2003

Uncle Tom's departure caused a sharp deterioration in the quality of record keeping in the ledgers, although the approach he had adopted of recording handwritten copies of invoices in a ledger was continued for several years. The work of doing this was passed around, the consistency and legibility of the copy very much depending upon whom the chore had fallen. In parallel with invoices, cashbooks, kept in the same way that Uncle Tom had done, recorded the flows of money in and out of the business. There were however two external changes in the

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regulation of businesses looming that would require the Wilkes brothers to change their approach to record keeping.

The first of these were changes in UK Firearms legislation in 1968 that required gunmakers and dealers to keep a register to record details of all shotguns and of their keepers. This kind of record had been necessary for many years for rifles, pistols and their ammunition, but extending it to guns caused a surge in work because Wilkes, like many other London gunmakers, held several hundred customers' guns in store. Tom and his wife spent many weekends going through all the racks of guns and cases in the shop, basement and workshop, compiling this information for the guns on the premises. Thereafter the resulting registers were updated whenever a customer brought a gun in to the shop or removed it, but they remained the property of the police, only those before 1973 surviving as a permanent record of the firm's business. These registers contained details of type of firearm and their make and number, along with the owner's address and were always in the shop for reference if needed. Less effort than previously was therefore put into recording details of firearms or their owners on invoice copies, so the surviving transaction records contain less information than was routinely recorded in Uncle Tom's days.

Unlike the first change that affected only the gun trade, the second change had a much broader impact. This was a change in sales tax in the UK. Purchase Tax, a tax introduced early in the war, had applied only to certain categories of new luxury goods. It was avoidable by small firms that made such goods in small quantity if they sold them for cash. In the thirty years in which Purchase Tax operated, Wilkes' records relating to the twenty or thereabouts newly made guns in that time are incomplete, few having entries in the register and many also having no invoices in the ledgers. The replacement of Purchase Tax with Value Added Tax in April 1973 effectively put a stop to such avoidance. VAT was applied to all the goods and services supplied by a firm, and was charged to them in turn by their suppliers, the tax on inputs being deductible. Only enterprises with very low annual turnover were exempt from charging VAT, some outworkers in the trade falling into this category. A business had an obligation to collect and to account precisely for all the tax it charged and deducted. It was said at the time that Britain had moved from being, as Napoleon had supposedly remarked, a nation of shopkeepers to being a nation of tax collectors. Wilkes abandoned the invoice ledgers they had used for half a century or more and switched to the use of the more ephemeral pre-printed duplicate invoice books that allowed a record to be kept of each invoice and the VAT charged on it. Each of these books contained 100 invoices. They were to use 140 books in the next 30 years and the invoices they contain appear complete financially, albeit sometimes lacking in descriptive detail. Significant invoices were typed on letterhead notepaper, the invoice book being used to record an abbreviated copy where the only need for accuracy was in the amount charged and the tax levied. The carbon copies in these invoice books survive as the main and occasionally illegible record of the business in its final 30 years.

The other record that should have contained details of the guns made is the number register. It might have been hoped that the serious return to making new guns that started in the mid-1970s' might have been accompanied by a renewed interest in keeping this important record of production up to date and complete. Sadly, this was not to be, fewer than half of the 154 guns and rifles made in the firm's last 30 years have an entry that is anything like complete, and several have no entry at all. The reasons for this are probably multiple. The work in the last few days prior to a gun being collected by or shipped to a customer tended to be a little frantic. It is easy to see that the recording of the particulars in the register would have been of low priority and easily overlooked until after the gun had left the premises. Tom compounded this by being very reluctant to record this information at all. His reasons are far from clear but a possible explanation follows. There were certainly very complete records of the money paid to suppliers and

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outworkers in making up guns, both in the cash books and the VAT accounts, and when sold to UK customers or exported, a further paper trail was created and kept. By this means the firm had full records of their production. Furthermore, the accounts of the firm are complete and auditable and updating the number register would not have been necessary for keeping the firm's books. Tom would often recount horror stories from fellow members of the trade about the time and effort consumed by either customs audits of VAT accounts or police investigations of licensing registers. He lived in dread of one of these being visited on the firm. I suspect he felt that the number register was not a record that was needed to run the business and therefore there was risk in keeping it as any inconsistencies in it might trigger a time-consuming investigation by one or other of these authorities.

There was an unfortunate consequence of this neglect of the number register. It was used to allocate numbers to new guns. Wilkes never had the volume of production to justify the elaborate processes used by the larger makers to allocate numbers to new products and then to ensure that these were impressed on all major components during manufacture. Wilkes guns did not acquire a number until they were being engraved, near the end of the manufacturing process, and then often only on the guard and fore-end; the barrels and action only sometimes being numbered. There are a few examples where numbers became muddled at some point between Wilkes and the engraver, so a set of four guns made in the 1980s were given numbers that had already been used once in 1932, this being achieved by transposing the same two digits in the numbers of all four guns. And there is one gun that went out showing on the rib that Wilkes had moved to 59 Beak Street. Customers often wanted to know the number of a new gun well before delivery, or perhaps wanted a particular number some way ahead of the sequence then being used. Without any methodical approach to using the register to allocate numbers, many went unused, whilst some were used on two, and in one case three, different firearms. This feature complicates the process of untangling exactly how many new guns and rifles Wilkes made in the final years of the business.

The Working Museum

79 Beak Street in the 1970s and later looked ever more like a time capsule, containing as it did a mass of tools and components from bygone ages. Many of these were still in active use and indeed the Wilkes brothers were constantly seeking out suppliers for consumables that they were accustomed to using. John was always on the lookout for good quality iron and steel stock. He could wax quite lyrically about the quality of a particularly good piece that he found that he was using to make a particular part. Restrictions on whale hunting had meant that sperm oil by the 1970s had become almost unobtainable. This had been used widely by the trade as a lubricant pre-war and had often been put in the oil bottles in cases, its use going in to decline when customers started complaining about the smell it imparted. But the use to which it was put in the workshop was in hardening springs, the brothers being reluctant to adopt the synthetic oils that were available as a replacement.

House Brothers, an ironmonger with a shop in Beak Street, were able to continue to supply some quite traditional products well into the seventies. One of these was colza oil, a *brassica* derived oil similar to rapeseed oil, which was used as the fuel for smoke lamps. They also stocked a variety of different products in everyday use in the workshop; linseed oils and various driers, fine abrasives like polishing paper, rottenstone and jewellers rouge for polishing wood and metal, and shellac, used for filling little holes in stocks and for holding ovals in place.

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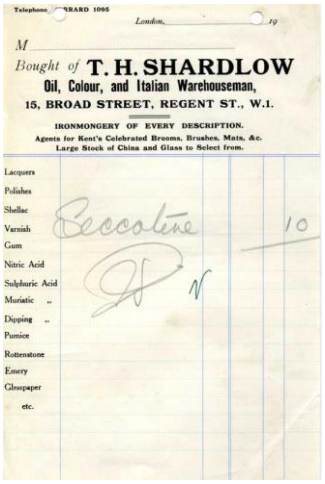
One of the adhesives that was much used was Seccotine, which was a variety of fish glue that was available in tubes. Although not making the strongest of joints it had the advantage of being water soluble, so was ideal for use for joints that might need to be broken later, such as the addition of lengthening pieces and recoil pads to stocks or the fixing of blocks, lining and labels in cases. Wilkes used it in large quantities, but it went out of production in the 1970s, and less satisfactory alternatives were substituted. In the 1990s a salesman visiting the shop announced that Seccotine had been re-introduced, the news being greeted with a large order for the product. When it was delivered there was much disappointment as the only characteristic that new product shared with the old was the name; the new Seccotine was a petroleum based adhesive, nothing like its fish glue based namesake.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Rottenstone
Emery
Glasspaper
etc.

A 1930s invoice for the original Seccotine. Shardlow's, around the corner in Broad Street, was able to offer some very interesting supplies.

Dealing and Renovations

For much of the early 1960s the turnover of the John Wilkes partnership had hovered around the £6,000 a year mark, about half its level in real terms of the late 1930s. In 1965 it rose slightly to £8,000, to £13,000 in 1966, to £20,000 in 1967 and to £37,000 in 1968, the first complete financial year under the new partnership. At this level it was similar to that of Boss & Co in this period. Although general inflation was contributing about 5% annually to this rise, the remainder of the increase was down to a growing volume of dealing activity undertaken by the firm. Jack in his final years in the firm was buying and selling second-hand guns in increasing numbers and these were fuelling the rise in turnover, both because the number of such transactions were increasing but also because the value of used guns was inflating. Unfortunately, there are no profit data for these years so we know nothing of the margins generated by this higher turnover. When John and Tom took over, the second-hand market was beginning to boom. It was a symptom of a broader economic malaise. With unprecedented levels of inflation there was a flight from money into anything that looked like it might hold its value, and guns were seen to be assets that might do that. In the early seventies money could be made quite easily by buying guns, keeping them for a short while and selling them.

Wilkes customers were not slow to recognise the opportunities so offered, and a few of them were buying and selling through the firm; effectively using the shop as a second-hand gun marketplace. Usually they held on to guns for a year or so but in some instances there was no need to be that patient. In 1970 a pair of Westley Richards boxlocks that Wilkes sold to a regular customer for £500, were sold on by him to another customer for £850 within a month. Wilkes took 10% on both sales but this still left the customer who had his name on the label for under a month with a very handsome return. Wilkes were never quick in submitting invoices – on occasions with deals like this the intermediary owner wasn't asked to pay them for the initial purchase until after he had banked the higher proceeds of the second sale.

It is easy to assume with the benefit of hindsight that the brothers were missing a trick here, but this is probably unfair. Their business was under-capitalised, and their long experience in the trade, both having been thirty years in the business by 1970, led them to be quite surprised by the explosion in values in the early 70s. A close friend of the brothers told me that he offered to help fund their dealing activity, but Tom was unwilling to take on the extra risk, so gradually over time they moved to selling guns on commission, rather than taking them on to their books. They were careful to ensure that, in performing this agency role, they did not offer for sale any guns

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that were unsound, and frequently they made extra revenue by re-proving, refurbishing or sometimes completely re-building the gun as part of a sale.

One of the most memorable restorations that they undertook in this period was a pair of guns that Tom was shown on a trip to the States. In conversation with someone to whom he was introduced it emerged that the other party owned a pair of Purdeys. He would like to show them to Tom. A double case was duly produced and when the lid was opened, what was inside looked nothing like a pair of Purdeys. The actions were plain and un-engraved and had a worn soda black finish, with all of the edges rolled and the pin holes dished. The stocks were un-chequered and gaping away from the metal, and the barrels had been hot soda blacked, with the tell-tale holes in the short ribs. It transpired that guns had been made in the 1920s and had been released to the customer for shooting in the white, a practice that was sometimes followed to allow the customer to check the fit and to allow the joints to bed down before the actions were hardened. On this occasion the customer had never returned them to Purdey for finishing. After finding their way to the States they appear to have been subjected to many years of amateur gunsmithing, which at some time must have included stripping the unhardened action and all the plates and polishing them individually on a bobbin. Wilkes took on the job some half century later of doing the work that Purdey should have been allowed to do before the guns were delivered. Before the finishing could begin the barrels had to be repaired, the actions completely re-filed and the guns restocked. John recounted the hours of work to get lock plates and trigger plate flat and closely fitting the action to sharpen up all the rolled edges. Eventually the guns were polished, engraved in the standard Purdey rose and scroll pattern and then hardened. They went back to their American owner in March 1973 looking like a pair of Purdeys should, and with a bill to their owner of £1,800, about a third of the price their maker would have charged for a new pair at the time.

Wilkes undertook many other major refurbishments during the 1970s, but few quite as extensive as this. Tom was also active in encouraging US owners of fine guns to bring them back to the UK for sale because prices were significantly higher here for a while. Some very fine and unusual guns made their way to Beak Street during those years. Two customers from the West Coast sold 30 guns from their collections between them through the firm in the first half of the seventies. They realised about £90,000 in total, not far removed from the prices of new guns at the time.

At one point the large cabinet inside the front door was full of guns any one of which would now make the cover of an auction catalogue were they to come up for sale again. The shop and workshop in the 1970s were packed to the rafters with guns. The front shop had cases on three walls. There was, for a time a free standing double height rack in the back shop as well as one on the wall, and there were several racks in the workshop upstairs. All the spare wall space downstairs was lined with cases, many of which had guns in them, the others having had their guns removed to the workshop. An inventory of all the weapons held in the shop in 1972 survives. There were over 700 guns, rifles and pistols in the shop. Around 60 of these were handguns kept in various cabinets, the remainder being guns and rifles in approximately equal numbers that were stored on the ground or first floors, the cellar being little used for storage. Of these, about 200 were in their cases in the front and back shops, the others being in racks and cabinets or in various states of disassembly in the workshop. Of the 660 or so guns and rifles, some 120 were by Purdey, Holland, Boss and Woodward, of which, remarkably some 28 were by the last of these makers. A high proportion of the remainder were of scarcely less reputable makes, including many by Wilkes themselves.

By the mid-70s the second-hand market was stabilising after a price surge, but this had attracted a lot of competition. The trade auctions that had been run by Christopher Brunker at Knight, Frank & Rutley had been replaced by regular auctions by the fine art auctioneers, first by Christie's in

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1971 followed almost immediately by Sotheby's, the former having attracted Brunker to run their department. Gradually these auction houses were to lure away some customers both seeking to sell or buy used guns from the trade. The established behaviour where shooters took their guns into their gunmaker for sale when they were no longer wanted was fast changing, and although Wilkes were often called on to pick up the pieces of when customers came by problem guns bought elsewhere especially at auction, their choice of where to buy or sell was mainly driven by money.

The itinerant dealers had also flourished from the surge in prices. Some of these had become regular customers of Wilkes, both buying from and selling to them and also bringing in repair and refurbishment jobs. The ambivalence of the brothers to these dealers remained. On the one hand they were useful to them in sourcing or disposing of firearms and bringing in repair work – but they were also direct competitors who had certain commercial advantages. Doing business with them lead to the occasional incident. In 1972, one such dealer sold to Wilkes an unexceptional pair of guns whose owner had recently died. He omitted to tell them that the guns had then been stolen from the store room of their London maker where their late owner normally kept them. When the police became involved, the dealer phoned Wilkes to recommend they engage a good solicitor, which turned out to be unnecessary as the police directed their enquires to the dealer himself. He did not visit the shop again.

Private UK Customers

Customers from the UK were to provide a steady stream of business throughout the last 30 years. There were a great many of these, far more than during the 1930s, and whilst some made regular appearances in the shop, none were to match the volumes of business of the firm's largest customers of pre-war years. Contacts with this latter group of patrons were dwindling as age took its toll, both Major Dowding and Cecil Horne making their last transactions with the firm in the late 70s and early 80s respectively.

For the younger generations of customers, much retail business was in the form of routine cleaning and repairs, replacing springs or internal limbs. In hindsight Wilkes charges for these small part replacement jobs, that are quite difficult to get undertaken today, look extraordinarily cheap. "Make the part to the gun and not to the broken part" was the advice that Tom would give to anyone in the shop making these replacement limbs. There was a sound rationale behind this in that parts frequently broke if they were not quite a perfect fit, so replicating the old part exactly would also replicate the stresses that had caused the original to fail.

A great many guns came in for annual overhaul, one particular customer doing this routinely year after year with a pair of Wilkes boxlocks that never seemed to need any remedial work. But other customer's guns seemed to be very heavily used. Two regular customers, both of whom owned pairs of much used Woodwards, brought them in very regularly for overhaul, and in many of these instances they were in need of major repairs. Along with ammunition there was a very steady trade in leather goods, Bryant's bags and belts finding use amongst shooters and amongst passers-by in search of unusual fashion accessories.

There was also a steady flow of major repairs, restocking, fitting new barrels or sleeving. Prices for these jobs moved steadily upwards; the following tabulation giving an idea of inflation in the trade during the period. Prices are averages for retail customers, are pre-tax and stocking costs include the cost of the wood.

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	Mid 1970s	Mid 1980s	Mid 1990s
Re-stock Sidelock	£250	£950	£2000
Re-stock Boxlock	£90	£350	£800
Re-barrel - dovetail	£250	£800	£2000
Sleeve	£80	£350	£800

Aside from routine replacements of this kind, there were a few unusual but quite major jobs, such as fore-end replacements. In one of these the customer brought in his gun in a slip having searched high and low on his last shoot and at his home for the missing part. After showing the gun to Wilkes minus the fore-end, and being appalled at the cost of replacing it, he agreed for the work to go ahead. In due course he was called back to the shop to collect his gun with the newly made fore-end. He paid his bill and his empty slip was retrieved from the rack where they were kept. As his gun was being put back in it, the original fore-end fell out.

A typical Woodward tailpipe

At various different times Wilkes took on the replacement of three Woodward tail pipes, which, being attached by a screw from the outside, were prone to dropping off in the field. I remember John bemoaning the fact that it was difficult to charge a customer the full cost of replacing such a part because they would never believe how much work was involved in making a new one, especially as in the case of the job in hand, when it had to match the pair gun. This was after he had spent the best part of two days on that one already.

There were some unusual invoices over the years. The Victorian appearance of the Wilkes workshop attracted film makers. Eon Productions, the makers of the James Bond film "The Man with the Golden Gun", paid Wilkes £100 in 1974 for the hire of tools to adorn a studio mock-up of a gunsmith's workshop. After the handgun ban came into force in the late 90s, Wilkes received a cheque in January 1998 from the Home Office for £3215 as an ex gratia payment to compensate for the destruction of the remaining handguns and parts that were on the premises, most of which had been there since the work for the SOE.

Overseas Customers

The firm of John Wilkes had customers from outside the UK since it was founded, but until the 1960s these had been very much in a minority. Wilkes' customers in this era were in the main UK nationals most of whom were living in the UK, the remainder being in overseas service either with government, the forces or privately. Relatively few of their customers in their first 70 years had been foreigners living overseas. As Soho became ever more cosmopolitan from 1960 onwards, so the number of overseas customers in the district's only gun shop increased.

Overseas customers whose purchases were exported immediately on sale were exempt from Purchase Tax, but this only applied to sales of certain luxury new products, so few required any attendant paperwork prior to 1973. With the introduction of VAT in that year, a tax which applied to a much broader basket of products, reclaiming VAT on export became a much more regular occurrence and Wilkes kept, along with their invoices, copies of the paperwork needed by the customer to do this. Overseas customers who had their purchases exported therefore created a large and informative paper trail.

In the late sixties Greeks and Greek Cypriots were well represented amongst Wilkes' customers. Predominantly this group appear to have been interested in basic boxlock guns up to the price of a

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new Webley 700, at the time about £120. A good proportion of these were exported to Greece and Cyprus, but the majority were sold to customers who were resident in the UK.

By 1970 there were growing numbers of Italian customers, many of whom had flourishing businesses in the restaurant trade in and around Soho. The majority of these were UK residents and some were to remain loyal customers of the firm for 30 years or more, buying mainly best guns and rifles in the second hand market and providing a steady flow of repair and alterations. They in turn introduced to Wilkes a number of dealers who traded in Italy. Some of these became regular long term customers for second hand guns. This was not entirely without risk, one of these dealers ending his relationship with Wilkes when they shipped a consignment of guns to him in the expectation that payment would follow, which it didn't.

Scandinavia and particularly Sweden was also a significant market. A few private customers came to buy from Wilkes on visits to the UK, but they also sold to dealers based in the Nordic countries, one Swedish dealer who became a close friend buying nearly 100 good quality second hand guns in a period of over 20 years. Most other European countries had a few of their nationals in the list of Wilkes' customers, the majority of these being resident in their base country, their purchases being exported.

It was customers from the Americas, and in particular the United States, that had by far the greatest impact on the firm's business in the last 40 years. Americans were in a majority in the list of customers for new guns, they provided a steady two-way trade in guns and rifles at the very top end of the second-hand market, and they had a steady demand to complete the presentation of guns or rifles already owned by putting them in new cases, surrounded by the right accessories. They also provided Tom in particular with hospitality and introductions on his visits to the US to keep the trade the firm did there flourishing. Business with the Americas wasn't confined to the States, Canada and a few South America countries providing some customers, but the US dominated Wilkes business from the 1970s on.

Mass Produced Guns and Rifles

Throughout the firm's existence there had been a steady trade in mass produced guns and rifles which were bought in to order for customers. Wilkes seldom held any stock of these. In the pre-war years a few customers bought Browning 5 shot automatic guns and a few of the same maker's early U&O guns, and there were occasional sales of rifles from several makers including Remington and Mannlicher Schönauer. After the war this trade grew steadily, and with Wilkes making relatively few guns in this period, they needed a source of inexpensive sporting guns to meet the demands of customers wanting a new specimen.

From the early 1960s they had been buying Webley & Scott 700s series boxlocks off the shelf from their maker. In the post war years Wilkes did not put their name and number on these. By the time John and Tom took over, the trade in these was brisk, over 100 being sold in the six years after the start of the new partnership in 1967. At the beginning of this period the basic 700 model, which constituted almost all of Wilkes' sales, was priced at just under £130 including Purchase Tax, a price that was to double by 1973. The top grade 701 was about £250 in 1967 and there was an intermediary grade model, the 702, priced at about £165. Wilkes sold a small number of 701 grade guns which were made to order and which could be delivered with options like extra quality wood. A pair of these was made to order and sold to a customer in a case in 1967 for £500. It seems that Wilkes were fairly flexible in their pricing, every 700 series gun they sold being invoiced at a different price from the one before.

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Even when it first appeared on the retail market in the 1950s, the 700 had always been a rather plain gun with a limited amount of open scroll engraving and stocks that had little in the way of figure. By the 1970s the engraving was sparser and the stocks were mostly completely un-figured. Wilkes were contributing in part to this. A stock dealer supplying walnut from New Zealand was importing batches of 200 or so stocks at a time that were destined for W&S, but he would bring these batches to Beak Street in transit to Birmingham. Here Tom would buy the best half dozen or so from the batch for use on boxlock re-stocking jobs, before the rest went to their intended customer. Whilst both Wilkes brothers remained firm admirers of the past capability of the Webley factory, they were to stop selling new W&S 700s in quantity quite abruptly in 1973. This may be because the takeover by the Harris and Sheldon Group, which took place in that year, interrupted supply or it may be because they felt that imported guns represented better value.

The importers Gunmark were at the time offering a boxlock gun sold as the Merlin that was made by Bernardelli in Italy. Its only drawback was that the action was held to the stock by a bolt through the hand that made cast and bend alterations difficult. Wilkes began to hold a small stock of these for occasional sale, whilst still buying in other makes of imported guns to meet specific customer orders. Towards the end of the 1970s they started to switch their attention to holding stocks of imported sidelocks, in particular those made by Arrieta of Spain, that were also imported by Gunmark. The steep rise in the value of best guns had created a market for an inexpensive sidelock amongst Wilkes by then quite large customer base, many of whom wanted to buy a reliable gun that could be used on days where a best might not be needed or may be at risk of damage. Gunmark offered Wilkes favourable terms on two Arrieta models. Tom offered these to his customers at attractive prices and the customers responded by ordering them at rate that exceeded all expectations, several hundred passing through the shop in the last 20 years of the century. In due course, some of these sales resulted in a flow of repair and alteration work. Contributing to the sales volume were high levels of export orders, as US customers in particular realised that, even with shipping and import duty costs added, it was much cheaper to buy an Arrieta gun from Wilkes and ship it to the US than it was to buy from the maker's US importer.

There was to be an unexpected consequence of this surge in exports. The UK Government at the time, beset with worries about the country's balance of payments deficit, had introduced a Queen's Award for Exports given to businesses that had outperformed their peers in export volumes. Because these volumes were recorded centrally, the responsible Ministry had all the information needed to decide who would be offered these awards without them applying and submitting details. In the mid-1980s, Tom was approached by the Ministry, with the news that John Wilkes was to be awarded the Queen's Award for Exports having outperformed both Holland & Holland and Purdey in the previous year. All Tom had to do was to apply. Despite being encouraged by his contacts at Holland & Holland to do so, Tom decided against. He knew that whilst some of the value of the firm's exports had been made up of newly manufactured guns, most was derived from second hand sales and from the re-export of imported Arietta guns. He felt it would be quite inappropriate for Wilkes to get the award when Purdey and Holland were making most of their export volume from newly manufactured goods.

Whilst most of the sales of mass produced guns were from these models that Wilkes held as stock, they also sold Merkel, Berretta and Browning OUs, Browning and Remington automatics and side by sides from AYA and Laurona, but none in any great volume. Rifle sales likewise were regular and mostly destined after the mid-1970s for the sporting market, bolt action models by Tikka, Sako, BRNO and Remington all passing through the shop. Having spent the best part of twenty years making up sporting bolt rifles for others, Wilkes made up only a few of these that bore their own name after 1970.

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In the early years of the partnership, starting in the mid-sixties, the firm had a very active role supplying the target rifle community, and that was down to their relationship with a particular manufacturer and an American customer who had first appeared in the shop in 1958.

Schultz & Larsen and George Swenson

George W.P. Swenson's first major purchase from John Wilkes was a .375 bolt rifle, 15099, that they made up in 1958, at the height of their business with Jeffery and Rigby, and sold to him retail for £100. Swenson, a US Army veteran of the Second World War, was a serious rifle enthusiast and inventor who went on to be a major customer of the firm. Business with him built up only slowly through the 1960s. In the late 1960s he wrote the book "A Pictorial History of the Rifle" that was published by Ian Allen in 1971. By 1967, Swenson was apparently very active in developing target rifles and his relationship with Wilkes was becoming more significant for both parties, as the firm by that time had acquired the UK agency for the Danish rifle maker Schultz and Larsen. This long-established manufacturer had a reputation for building finely engineered rifles, but Wilkes' interest in them was driven mainly by the quality of their barrels. They were the only quantity manufacturer of bolt action barrels that was still cutting the rifling, all others having moved to the much cheaper approach of compressing the barrel tube around a rifled mandrel.

George Swenson, together with a partner, H.L. Ingram, were planning the development of a highly-refined target rifle, for which they were to need engineering suppliers who could make up the various components to the exacting standards needed. The complete rifle, to be known as the Swing, a name derived from their two surnames, was to take several years to perfect. Swenson recognised there would be a vigorous market in the component parts amongst the quite large community of target shooters even before the completed rifle was available. This was not a customer group that had been naturally drawn to Wilkes previously, but the Schultz and Larsen agency had gone some way to raising the firm's profile.

At some point after Jack's death, the idea was formed that George Swenson would move his business into Wilkes shop, thereby bringing with him his community of customers. It is not clear from surviving records exactly what the commercial arrangements were. Invoices for target shooters were kept for a few years in a separate part of the ledger, but all of the money involved seems to have passed through the firm. The most likely arrangement is that Swenson was being given a share of the profits from this side of the business. It is unlikely that he was ever directly employed by Wilkes

The firm's previous front shop man had left under a cloud before Jack died. When George moved in, he made the desk in the back shop that had a view of the front door his territory and served the business as a whole by effectively manning the downstairs shop whilst John and Tom were upstairs. He wasn't exactly a welcoming presence in this capacity, preferring to leave the lights in the front shop off and the connecting door closed, thereby giving the impression to all but the most determined customer that John Wilkes was closed that particular day. The instant he determined that any customer entering the shop was not interested in target rifles, he would summon help from upstairs. To customers whose interest was in guns, he was therefore an almost unnoticed presence. From the perspective of the archives, he also had very untidy handwriting, adding to the proportion of records that are now less intelligible than might be wished.

Wilkes were much involved in the early stages of manufacture of the new Swing rifle. John had contributed several refinements to its prototype components which were then passed to engineering contractors for mass production, Craig Whitsey then took on much of the work in

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getting the first batch of 100 Swing rifles assembled and finished. Even before this work was finished, Swenson brought to the Wilkes business a large volume of sales, both to individual enthusiasts but also to others in the trade needing a source of component parts. In particular Schultz & Larsen barrels passed through the firm by the hundred along with fewer made up rifles, some going to the sporting market as well as to George's community of target shooters.

John and Tom had more than enough to keep them occupied with guns where invoices tended to be much higher and profits more easily made, so the two sides of the business had little to bind them together. It was not a stable relationship, there being little rapport between George and the Wilkes brothers. By the time the Swing rifle became a recognised success it was at breaking point. Around 1974 there was a disagreement between the brothers and George Swenson over the strength and therefore the safety of the 7.62mm version of the Swing, which seems to have led George to want continue the development of his product independently. Without telling the brothers, he wrote to Schultz & Larsen on Wilkes headed notepaper, signing the letter "John Wilkes", surrendering the UK agency and asking them to transfer it to his own company. Having done that, he then told John and Tom of his intention to leave immediately, which he duly did two days later taking with him all of his collection of rifles in the shop and a few that belonged to Wilkes along with them. There was no further contact with him, but in 1975 Ingram took away from the shop a very large residual collection of component parts for target rifles. The invoice of over £2000 was paid for out of money owed to George Swenson

Whilst there was some considerable rancour about the loss of the agency, the parting of the ways was probably inevitable and was to set a pattern that would be seen again twenty years later when the Wilkes brothers were beginning to contemplate retirement. In his particular case they had entered into a business partnership probably without realising it. Swenson brought the design and the contacts to sell the product, Wilkes brought over fifty man-years of rifle making engineering experience and the contacts to get components made to exacting standards. But they expected to keep control of anything that had a bearing on the firm's reputation. Without writing any of this down, in particular whether Swenson had the authority to sign for the firm, it was perhaps inevitable that once the product moved out of development there would be conflicts.

George went on to make a success of the Swing rifle. He died in 1997 in the States at the age of 82. Wilkes continued to supply parts and Shultz & Larsen barrels to rifle shooters whilst they still held stocks of these. There was to be a steady stream of rifle refurbishment work, some of this a legacy of the association with George, but his departure cut off an avenue into which the business could have developed. But there were to be other opportunities open to Wilkes to grow their business.

George Swenson's place looking after Wilkes' front shop was taken over for a while by another George, their long-term friend George Strachan, who was no longer needed at Moss Bros after they had closed their Gun Room. "Little George", as the brothers usually referred to him, performed this role cordially and effectively for a few years, but he was in poor health and was unable to carry on for long.

Trade Customers

The regular flow of work from other members of the London trade, that had been so important to Wilkes in the 50s and 60s continued through the economic hiatus of the early 1970s and was to go on well into the 1990s. Tom had strong personal contacts with both Holland & Holland and with Boss & Co. Both, especially the former, gave Wilkes regular work, mainly the kind of jobs that would involve taking their own people off making new guns.

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For Holland, they restocked about 25 guns and rifles in the 1970s and 1980s, alongside undertaking a number of small jobs like refitting pads and ovals. Some of these were simple re-stocking jobs for which, from the mid-70s onward, Holland's were providing partly machined blanks produced on a copying machine, but others were more elaborate, like a pair of cross eye best guns that were annealed and the actions straightened before being re-stocked and re-hardened, the bill for these in 1981 being £1000. Re-barrelling jobs were also done for them, both by the making of new barrels and by sleeving. In 1976 they converted a Woodward OU to double trigger and rebuilt the lock work, the bill being £130, about the same as the cost of restocking from a machining at the time. There was also a steady two-way trade in second hand guns between the two firms. Typically, Wilkes charged Holland about 60 to 70% of the cost of equivalent retail work, although the invoices frequently show jobs requested to be returned in the white. With Boss the type of work passed to Wilkes was similar, but the number of major jobs was far fewer; they undertook one sleeving job and seven re-stockers in the late seventies.

The firm served as a convenient workshop in the centre of the capital for time critical work. William Evans used Wilkes for stock alterations on a regular basis and the occasional jobs came in from Thomas Bland, John Rigby, Farlows, Roberts, and Cogswell & Harrison, as well as several small jobs from retail gun shops in and around London. Westley Richards sent down one chequering job from Birmingham, and Purdey occasionally asked Wilkes to supply rifle sights. This trade work, whilst helping to fill gaps in the flow of work, was never sufficient in quantity or profitability to support the business in the way trade work had in the 1950s. But that was about to change with work from a completely unexpected source.

Asprey & Co

By the early 1980s the family run firm of Asprey & Co had been established for over 200 years, for much of that time trading from a prestigious shop in Bond Street. From there they made and sold jewellery, silverware and wide range of *objets d'art*. In the early 1980s they had identified a sizeable market in the Middle East for elaborately ornamented presentation weapons, especially handguns, and were seeking a source in the London gun trade that could supply these, basing them on commercially available pistols, cased with complete sets of decorated accessories. Whilst the primary objective of these weapons was ornamental, they were to be usable if needs be.

In late 1982, Asprey approached Wilkes to sound out their interest in taking on this work, and any other work that might come up if the firm was to develop further its business of supplying guns as part of its range of lifestyle goods. Wilkes explored sourcing the pistols, initially Smith & Wesson revolvers, and the cases for them that were to be made by Bryant. The tools and oil bottles came from Wood, and Don Simmons, who had been engraving Wilkes guns for many years by then, was invited to take on the work of ornamenting the pistols.

In the next eleven years Wilkes were to turn out 130 S&W revolvers as cased presentation weapons all bearing Asprey's name and numbers. In addition, they decorated four SIG 9mm automatic pistols and cased them, and cased half a dozen others by this maker, along with a dozen or so Browning 9mm automatics. When the revolvers, nearly all of which were .357 in varying barrel lengths, came into the shop, the first job was to make and fit the grips. A few were finished with commercial rubber grips or those supplied by Pachmayr, but most had grips made of walnut, horn, ivory, in some instances fitted with silver caps to these grips. The solid grips were milled in the cellar to make keys to fit either side of the frame and then shaped and finished by hand. The revolvers were then stripped and the frame and all exposed surfaces stripped of any existing finishes and filed until all surfaces were flat, free from maker's stamps with all edges

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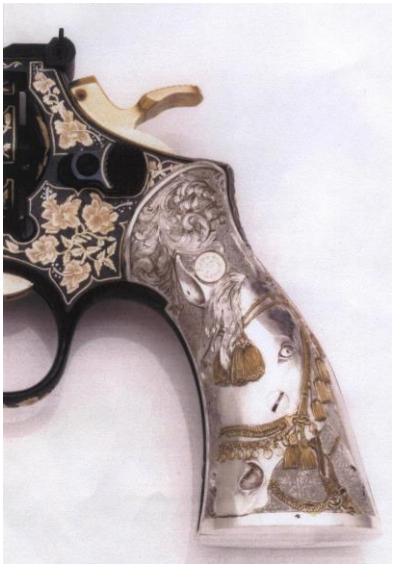
sharp, straight and square. John made jigs for holding each of the parts whilst this was done. Even with the help of these, preparing a pistol for engraving took many hours of careful filing and polishing.

They then went to Don Simmons who applied one of several standard patterns of ornamentation, usually a combination of gold lines, scroll engraving and gold inlay, with those with silver grips having deep carving applied. On returning from the engraver the frame and cylinder were finished in ways that best complemented the engraving, either hardening, bright finish or blueing. Hammers and triggers were sometimes gilded. The grips were refitted and the pistol sent to Bryant along with a group of accessories with handles of horn or ivory to match the pistol's grip. Cases were nearly always leather, lined with baize or velvet, the most common colour for the case being oxblood, and variously were held closed by either straps with one lock or by two locks without straps. Many were singly cased revolvers, but a few orders were for pairs of pistols or for garnitures of two or more different types of weapon in a single case. The accessories supplied were normally two oil bottles, a horn or ivory handled cleaning rod and matching screwdriver, brushes and jag. They were engraved with Asprey's name, the oil bottles also named, ornamentally engraved and gold plated, this work being done by the engraver S.G.Winter, who lived in the same neighbourhood as the Wilkes brothers and on whom they called for all their initialling and gold fretwork. The whole ensemble was then put back in its case before being delivered by hand to Asprey with a typed invoice, which was normally paid within 90 days. There is no indication whatsoever on any of these presentation pieces that they have been finished by Wilkes, the only accreditation they bear is to Asprey.

S&W revolver finished with gold inlay on a blued ground, walnut grips and cased with accessories, as delivered to Asprey

The prices charged to Asprey started in 1983 at about £2,500 for a single cased revolver with standard grips, this rising to £4,200 with silver capped walnut grips and £4,900 if the grips were of ivory. Over time, inflation and the gradual drive to ever more elaborate ornamentation pushed the prices up further, the final batch sold in 1993 with horn grips (after the use of ivory was banned in 1990), with gold plated and carved silver grip caps being priced at £7,600. On the face of it this price is quite high, about half the cost of a fully engraved best gun at the time, but the engraving cost alone including the gold and silver caps was over £3,200, the case over £400, and the accessories about the same. On top of this was the cost of the basic pistol, the horn and the finishing costs. John would sometimes comment rather bleakly that these pistols took so much time to finish that despite the significant prices that Wilkes were charging for them, there was little profit in them.



Silver grips on a S&W pistol for Asprey

Some of the first work undertaken for Asprey had been putting simple gold line ornaments on four SIG automatic pistols. As soon as they were delivered to the shop, Tom realised they were

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too hard to engrave and duly approached the manufacturer to see if the four pistols could be supplied prior to hardening. This was done, the gold work cut in and the pistols returned to the manufacturer for hardening. When they came back, they were cased and sent round to Asprey. Throughout the time that Asprey were ordering pistols from Wilkes they were gradually growing their in-house capability as a gunmaker, so it was no surprise that they would start applying their own ornamentation to pistols. When they tried this, it wasn't long before John Asprey came into the shop with a SIG pistol bearing some very uneven and crooked gold lines, asking if Wilkes could do anything to straighten these out. He was to leave disappointed.

SIG automatic pistol cased for Asprey

Alongside the orders for pistols came a steady stream of others, each in its way unique, for cases, case accessories and the work to fit some of Asprey's weapons into these. There were also a few unusual orders to supply weapons, for instance, a major commission in 1984 for Wilkes to make a group of rifles for royal presentation. They also sold Asprey a few very unusual antique weapons which had been bought in from dealers. Around 1988 there were several orders for component parts, like barrels, extractors and furniture all of which Wilkes sold on at cost, along with new bore and wall gauges and a couple of barrelled actions. These were all part of Asprey's drive to become a fully-fledged gunmaker. In 1991 Wilkes finished two 20 bore sidelock actions from the barrel and action state for £9000, having part finished two other guns two years previously.

Wilkes made up very few bolt rifles after 1980. This one was made for Asprey and was destined for presentation by a member of the Royal family on an overseas visit.

In 1988 John Asprey, the chairman of the family firm, wrote to the Wilkes brothers with a proposal to form a joint company, in essence offering to invest in John Wilkes in return for having access to the brothers' knowledge for as long as they continued working and taking over the Wilkes name thereafter. The proposal offered a prospect of a future move to the other side of Regent Street (*i.e.* from Soho into Mayfair), but meanwhile making some investment in the Beak Street premises. This proposal was never pursued; although one or two like it were to follow from other sources in years to come it is doubtful if, in 1988, either brother was ready to contemplate losing control of the family firm.

Orders from Asprey were to stop as abruptly as they had begun in 1993, the last embellished revolver being delivered in April. The following month Asprey sold to Wilkes a batch of component parts for new guns, some of which they had bought from them a few years earlier. The business from Asprey in just over ten years amounted to almost £750,000. Although their

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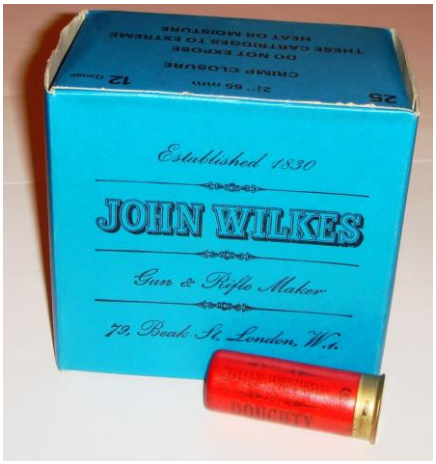
gunmaking business continued for a while, there was turmoil ahead for the firm as a whole, and it passed out of family ownership and gave up its gunmaking activities.

Ammunition and Invoices

Wilkes carried on providing shotgun ammunition to customers in the 1970s and beyond in much the same way as they had since pre-war days. They bought in Eley ammunition for the unusual loads and case sizes, tending to order these in response to individual requests and holding only small residual stocks of these types. In the more commonly used game loads they stocked their own brand, a paper cased cartridge loaded by the Hull Cartridge Co, with cases printed with their "Doughty" brand and the firm's name and address, a logo which was also printed on the 25 sized boxes. The cartridge market was quite competitive by the mid-70s and Wilkes responded by also stocking a few selected brands of imported ammunition which were priced slightly below UK manufactured alternatives.

Buying patterns were altering and although there was still a steady stream of people wandering in for just a box or two of ammunition, by the 1970s most of the volume sales were in lots of 500 and upwards. In pre-war times, when cartridges were relatively much more expensive, the manufacturers would ship quantities like these direct to the customer's address by rail. This was now a service only available to customers placing a single order for 10,000 or more rounds, which only one or two did. All smaller batches were delivered to the shop, from where customers usually had to collect them. With 20,000 rounds weighing almost a ton, dividing new deliveries between the concrete floor in the cellar and the wooden floor of questionable strength in the shop was a challenge, particularly as it was the latter that was most accessible to the street for delivery and collection.



A sample of the last batch of "Doughty" ammunition.

Judging by surviving records, Wilkes invoicing for smaller items, accessories and consumables was usually careful and complete if rather slow, surprisingly so given that the shop was never really geared up for volume retailing. For many small consumables the costs of invoicing and recording the transaction in the ledgers must have exceeded the margin. There are many invoices for cartridges, probably over 25% of those made out, but cartridge invoicing was nevertheless a looming problem with several underlying causes.

Parking enforcement in Central London had become much increased in the 1970s, so the collection of cartridges by car, which was really the only practicable method for batches of more than 250 rounds, was usually a rushed affair; the customer often arriving without prior warning, dumping a few 250 sized boxes in the back of his car, and driving off as quickly as possible before his vehicle attracted the attention of an omnipresent Traffic Warden. Invoicing was dealt with later; or at least that was the plan. For this to happen required a note to have been taken of who took how much ammunition and when, and in the rush this was not always done. Furthermore, Tom was sometimes reluctant to invoice good customers for ammunition, using it instead as a gift to thank them for their custom. And there was a small community of customers who Tom had no reason to thank, some of them surprisingly well connected, who would collect

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their season's supply of ammunition, and be invoiced for it, only to come a year later to repeat the process completely unfazed by the knowledge that the previous year's invoice was still unpaid.

When the business was running down in the 1990s, cartridge purchases, which were continuing in high volumes, were starting to have an impact on cash flow, payment for a particularly large delivery of over 50,000 rounds overdrawing the firm's account. A trawl through the books was done to see why this might be. By counting the numbers of cartridges delivered and comparing it with those invoiced and paid for, it was found that more than a year's volume of shotgun ammunition remained unaccounted for. At that point the decision was taken not to order any further bulk supplies, effectively bringing an end to the Doughty cartridge when supplies then in stock were exhausted.

The Shop

One of the constant concerns for the Wilkes brothers over the years had been the affordability of rents in Soho as the area became ever more fashionable. Their landlord, the snappily titled Sir Richard Sutton's Settled Estates, had been in the habit of asking for regular rent reviews. There was however growing government interest in promoting ownership of property, mainly aimed at residential property. One of the provisions that was introduced was that of giving very long term tenants the right to buy the freehold of their tenancies. The Wilkes, who had been tenants for sixty years, were able to take advantage of this so that in 1987 they were able to purchase the freehold of 79 Beak Street. They were able to reach an understanding with the tenant of the flat above the shop and thereby took over the entire property. The upstairs flat was used for occasional overnight accommodation but seems to have served primarily as a storage space for walnut.

Aside from freeing them of the concern that rents might become unaffordable, this change gave the firm an asset against which they could borrow if need be. It left the firm very much stronger financially at a time when the brothers, both of whom by then were over sixty, wanted to run down the amount of time they spent at work.

Gunmaking

As good second-hand guns became harder to find, and as more of those that did come up for sale found their way to the auction rooms first, John and Tom started to consider making new guns again; something the firm had not done in any volume since the 1930s. The London trade at the time was turning out fewer guns than at any time in its recent history, but Holland & Holland, through their success in selling Malcolm Lyell's exhibition quality garnitures, and Purdey's, in selling guns that were effectively canvasses for artwork created by Ken Hunt and others, suggested there was a sufficiently large market if the quality was good enough. Wilkes had occasionally made up one or two barrelled actions that had been in the shop for some time and had also made a few high quality bespoke bolt rifles to order from customers.

The first complete best gun they made was a sidelock ejector 16279. This number which was completely out of sequence had been stamped on the action flats of a machining they had held in stock since before the war. This was jointed in to a pair of pre-war made Whitworth barrels, together with locks and furniture that had been in the shop for many years. It was engraved very elaborately with rose and scroll by Don Simmons, an unusual feature of his work on this gun being that the roses were inlaid with several different alloys of gold and platinum to make them multi-coloured. This gun stayed in the shop as it was gradually finished over a period of years, its first customer withdrawing from the purchase because of financial difficulties. It probably did

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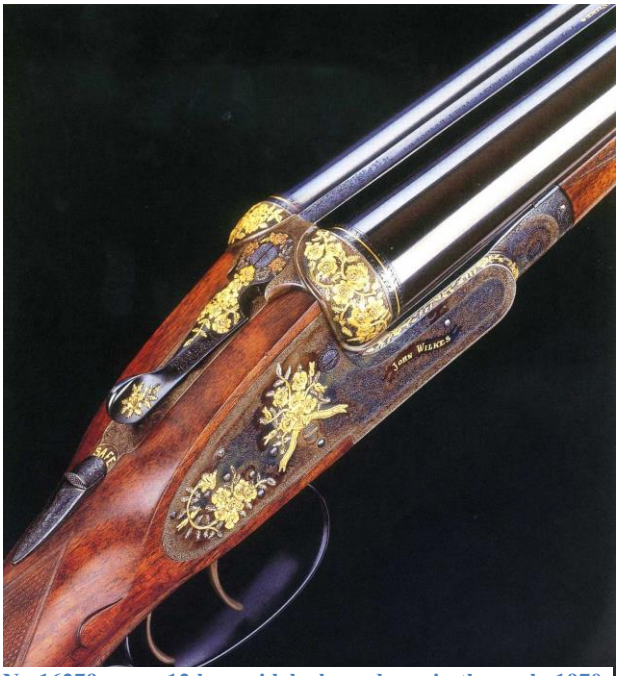
more than any other in promoting the sale of new Wilkes guns. It is illustrated in Volume I of Nigel Brown's[7] book.



No 16279 was a 12 bore sidelock made up in the early 1970s from largely pre-war components and elaborately engraved by Don Simmons. It was to serve as the prototype for the 123 further guns to be made in the next 30 years.

Before embarking on making guns seriously, the brothers had to secure suppliers of component parts. Although there was nowhere near the choice of these that their father would have had, they were successful in securing sufficient to set up a production process that would turn out 4-5 guns per year, although the scarcity of parts meant that for some components they were bulk buying several year's supply at a time when they could find them. Barrel tubes came from Webley & Scott or Holland & Holland, action and fore-end machinings from J.B. Phillipson in Birmingham, locks from York and Wallin, and some of the investment castings for furniture and lever work were also supplied by Holland & Holland. For much of the post war period stock blanks had been bought in small lots as and when needed and the supply in the shop in the early 1970s was quite small – around 20 or so blanks. Tom went on several excursions to buy wood in France and Germany returning with van loads in various grades. Eventually so much of it was held that Wilkes could offer a wide range of choice to customers, most of it of wood that had been in the shop or the flat above it for a decade or more to complete the process of drying out. He was also supplying other gunmakers from time to time, Boss & Co in particular taking 3 pairs of stocks in 1980.

Well matched pair of stocks on a pair of guns delivered in 1996

The first stage in making up a gun was to machine the chopper lump tubes to get the mating surfaces flat and correctly angled so that the tubes would come together with the correct spacing between centres, jobs that Craig Whitsey did at his workshop in Arundel in West Sussex. These then went to one of two barrel filers who filed the tubes down to profile, brazed them together, inserted the packing and fitted and tinned on the ribs. These were then sent along with the action machining to a specialist in the West Midlands, who machined the lumps and flats, cut out the lumps, put in the extractors, made up and fitted the crosspin and jointed the barrels into the action. The barrel and action was then sent to an actioner in the London trade who was taking in outwork, and he filed up the action to the rough state, fitted the locks and all the inside work, including the bolt, spindle and lever, fitted the trigger plate and furniture, safety work and made up the ejector work and fore end snap. At this stage the completed barrel

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and action came back to Beak Street. Whilst most guns would have been made up to specific customer orders, a few barrelled actions were held in stock at this stage of manufacture. Whilst in the shop they would be sent for proof. After having an early experience with a fully finished, engraved and hardened .410 cracking at proof, Wilkes thereafter sent barrels and actions for proof at the earliest opportunity.

As soon as the customer for the gun was certain and stock measurements were known, barrelled action and chosen stock blank would be sent to one of several outworker stockers to the London trade. Phil Goodship still did some but not all of this work. Wilkes used very finely figured wood on all their best guns, the grades which auctioneers would call highly figured or exhibition. But both brothers were adamant about getting straightness and tightness of grain, dryness and density right as well. Customers sometimes found difficulty in accepting the argument that a really spectacularly figured piece of wood that was cross in the hand would be the wrong choice and a few insisted on sourcing their own wood; on at least one occasion this resulting in stock that broke during manufacture. Guns would come back from the stocker held together by slave pins with all the lock work and ejectors approximately working but everything very tight. Tom would then take the gun in hand, partly free it, finish file it adding any little extra fillets or details the customer wanted, and then John or Craig would make off all the pins and burnish all the surfaces. The stock would also be smoothed and finished. The gun would then be stripped and all the exposed parts sent to an engraver. Wilkes used several engravers in the 30 or more years. Don Simmons did a great many of their guns, but Ken Hunt, Danny O'Brien, David Tallett and others engraved new guns for them as well. Wilkes standard pattern was their particular layout of rose and scroll, the same they had used in the 1930s, often with the name in gold in roman or gothic script, but a growing number of customers wanted more elaborate engraving and gold inlay, which could always be done but at extra cost. Some of their guns made in this period were very elaborately decorated with either extensive gold inlay or pictorial carving or a combination of the two.

Whilst the action and other parts were with the engraver, the oval or initials would be let in and the stock would be oiled. Usually this would start with several coats of alkanet oil. Some wood could be finished with this alone over time allowing it to air dry, but usually un-dyed oil and drier were used to get the final finish, care always taken to avoid overdoing the alkanet oil, which could make well figured wood go almost black. There were several other finishing oils made up in the shop that were used if a particular piece of wood proved difficult, as some did.

Wilkes engraving varied from the elaborate, as on the 3" chambered gun 15293 above, through to the restrained traditional rose and scroll on the .500/465 double rifle 15483 on the next page.

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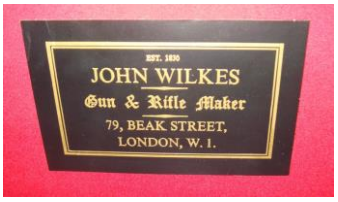
A deeply carved single trigger guard engraved by Don Simmons

Whilst the stock was being oiled over several weeks, John or Craig would take the box of inside work and harden and polish it all, although sometimes this work would be sent out. On some guns inside work was then sent for gilding. On coming back from the engraver, the ironwork was all sent straight to Ray St Ledger in Birmingham for hardening and the steelwork for blacking. When this returned, the gun was put together finally, the correct functioning and regulation of the lock work, safety work and ejectors being adjusted and regulated. The barrels were finally smoked down and the joint freed. The barrels were finished



Several pictures of 15286, a self-opening 12 bore sold in 1992, engraved by Ken Hunt with a mixture of fine pictorial engraving of birds in borders of deeply cut leaves. The gothic script for Wilkes' name was often used. The gun is pictured in its case with turnscrews and the usual engraved and gold washed oil bottles and snap caps.

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around the breech ends, ensuring the rib fitted exactly to the line of the fences. These were then sent to the engraver for naming and engraving around the breech and along the rib, and from there they went to Johnsons for blacking. Tom meanwhile would lay out the chequering on the stock and fore-end, run it up and finish it, and then get the finished stock to an engraver for the oval to have the customer's initials or whatever cut on. In later years as Tom's eyesight deteriorated, stocks were sometimes sent out for chequering.

The barrels were cleaned up after black and the gun would be finally assembled and tested. It then had to spend a day or two at the case maker to get it fitted in to whatever type of case the customer wanted. Snap caps, oil bottle, often engraved and gold washed, were put in the case along with cleaning rods and of course a black leather label; the gun would then be ready for the customer to collect. Very often the first outing was to the shooting grounds after which the gun might come back for adjustments to the mechanics or the chokes. With so many overseas customers, guns were often directly exported immediately on completion. This was less than ideal if one of these early adjustments was found to be needed. Some newly made guns came back for occasional overhaul, but probably many saw only light usage and their owners may have felt this was therefore unnecessary. One of the most ornately engraved pairs of guns made certainly did come back after their owner left them muzzles up in the rain in a grouse butt overnight. Drying out the heads of the stocks and removing the resulting internal rust was a major and unwelcome undertaking.

Not all guns went through the process above in the well managed and regimented process described, but the above is an attempt to summarise the way in which a typical gun would have been made in this period. Of the sidelock guns made, only those built as pairs were the same, and these often were ordered to differ in details of engraving. Wilkes would make anything the customer requested, so some guns were made with Holland pattern self-openers, some were fitted with Miller single triggers, most had Holland pattern locks but a few had the Boss style of interceptor. One gun was made with left hand lever work, and one 20 bore was fitted with an interchangeable pair of 28 bore barrels. Fore-end lengths also were variable, many customers requesting Wilkes to supply long splinter fore-ends, a feature they had carried over from pre-war days.

The invoices constitute an accurate source of information about the guns made, albeit one that has in most cases rather sparse details about gun specifications. Drawing on these data, we know that between 1967 and 2003, Wilkes made 124 sidelock guns. Of these, three were 3½" chambered 10 bores, for which Phillipson had to prepare special machinings, 44 were 12 bores, 39 were 20 bores, 21 were 28 bores, 15 were .410s, just one was 16 bore and one 20 bore had an interchangeable pair of 28 bore barrels.

In the same period, they made 15 boxlocks of which six were based on 20 bore W&S actions. Tom had ordered these as barrelled actions for £100 each from Webley & Scott in 1970. They came as partly filed 700 series actions, without stocks, and each with an extra pair of interchangeable barrels. They were finish filed in a variety of styles, and stocked with good wood, before being engraved and hardened – two retaining their W&S numbers whilst the others were given numbers in Wilkes' sequence. They were not finished all at once, the last leaving the shop fully finished nearly 25 years after it came in as a barrelled action. Of the remaining boxlocks, seven were twelve bores and there was one each in 28 bore and 20 bore. They made ten bolt rifles, two sidelock double rifles, one each in .450/.400 and .500/.465, a hammer single rifle and two hammer guns in 12 bore. In total this is 154 firearms, nearly all of which were made in 25 years starting in 1977. Three of this number were finished by Craig Whitsey after 2003.

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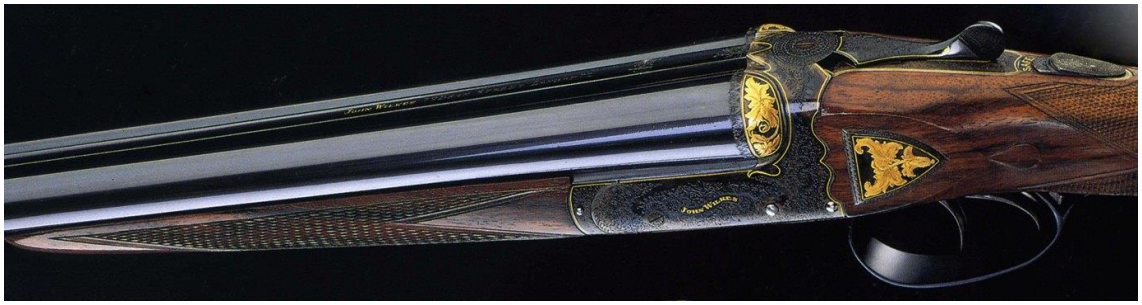

One of the six W&S 20 bores stocked and finished by Wilkes - this one 141914 was sold to the Tulchan collection.

Numbering in this group of guns was a bit chaotic for reasons already explained. There were eleven instances where the same number was used twice and one where the same number was used three times. Most of these guns and rifles bear numbers between 15120 and 15502, but a few have numbers outside this range, sometimes for no better reason than the customer wanted a particular number, even if it had been used before.

As regards pricing, Wilkes continued with their approach of undercutting their competitors in London. There was no such thing as a list price. Tom would price a gun according to its specification, the particular variables likely to bear most on the price being the style of engraving, the supply of extra barrels and the type of case used. Although most of the sidelocks were singles or pairs, one set of three matching guns, and three garnitures of matching guns in different bore sizes were made. The latter in particular had very elaborate cases. Customers would normally pay in instalments, there seldom being more than three years between the first instalment and delivery.

Prices charged in 1978 were just over £4,000 for a best highly engraved gun in an oak and leather case. By 1984 this had risen to about £7,500, to £10,000 by 1990 and to £18,000 by 1996, much depending on the specification of the gun. The double rifles and the three 10 bores and one 12 bore 3" gun that had very elaborate engraving were priced about 50% higher than normal guns. Although it is pointless trying to make accurate comparisons, Wilkes prices in the period are approximately 60% of Purdey's contemporary prices for their standard gun.

When John and Tom started making guns in the late 70s, a good proportion of their production in the first 10 years or so were to end up being owned by one customer in what came to be known as the Tulchan Lodge Collection. The story of how this collection was assembled is an unusually colourful one, but one that was to leave an unjustified tarnish on the firm's reputation.

The Tulchan Lodge Collection

In 1977 the Wilkes brothers were approached by a dealer who had been a customer of theirs for about a decade with a request that they help him with a commission that he had been given by a member of the Royal family to assemble a collection of high quality sporting firearms as an investment. The patron, they were assured, was of advanced years and, because of failing eyesight, had a particular penchant for guns ornamented with gold. He would be interested in buying both vintage guns and those of recent manufacture particularly if they had gold embellishment, which could be added to existing guns if appropriate. He would expect the guns to bear distinguishing marks such as monograms of his immediate family. Purchasing decisions

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and the specification of any decoration or identification would be left to the dealer who would be acting as his agent.

In a period of ten years, over 90 guns and rifles of their own and other makes passed through Wilkes to the dealer, destined for this collection. Some were sold to the collection, either newly made or second hand; others the dealer brought in and Wilkes did work on them. In total invoices amounting to about £370,000 over the period were submitted. Of the guns and rifles supplied, 25 were newly made Wilkes guns, three were new Wilkes rifles, and nine were older Wilkes guns which were rebuilt, these between them accounting for about £180,000 out of the total. Most of the new guns, which were gold inlaid to patterns specified by the dealer, were supplied in fitted cases made by Bryant, with accessories that often included engraved, gold washed oil bottles and snap caps. The second-hand examples were sometimes annealed, re-engraved with the addition of gold motifs to patterns supplied by the dealer and then re-hardened. A few of these motifs were crests or other heraldic symbols which, as the Wilkes brothers were assured by the dealer, the Royal patron had requested. Some others had ciphers or monograms engraved on stock ovals, again to designs specified in writing by the dealer to accord with the wishes of the patron. Supporting documents that apparently originated from the patron were also produced. Not all the used guns and rifles were re-embellished but many of them were so altered. Those going to the collection were promptly paid for by the dealer with cheques drawn on an account in the name of the "Windsor Star Trust".

John was less enthusiastic about the embellishment of existing guns than his brother. He took the view that guns that had already seen half a century or more of use should be left as they were made, and should not be exposed to the risk of annealing and re-hardening for purely cosmetic reasons. If they needed annealing in order to reset a strap or for some other alteration, he would go along with that, but he did not approve of doing it just for appearance's sake. Tom on the other hand would do the work as well as he could as long as he had a customer who was willing to pay for it. John's reservations about their work on the collection were voiced occasionally but the work went ahead nonetheless. Neither of them had such qualms about embellishing new guns.

The accumulation of the collection progressed steadily through the 1980s. Although the identity of the patron, a royal duke, had been told to the Wilkes brothers, they had never met him and would not be allowed to do so as he wished to ensure that his collecting activities were completely confidential. This wish they honoured. In several contemporary conversations with them, both brothers were always completely discrete about the customer for whom all these firearms were being made, although less so about the identity of the dealer who was commissioning the work. They had been told that if the assembly of the collection became public knowledge, it would stop.

Even whilst the collection was being assembled, there were some alarm bells beginning to sound. By no means was all of the collection being sourced from Wilkes, although many of the specimens coming from elsewhere in the trade passed through the shop on their way to the Duke. At least two other leading makers were approached by the same dealer to add similar types of embellishment to existing guns. Both of these contacted Tom to exchange notes and perhaps to seek some mutual assurance that this customer was entirely above board.

The first clear suggestion that something might be amiss came around 1986 when a Wilkes customer came into the shop. He had just returned from a shooting weekend in the Scottish Highlands where he had been the guest of a Swiss businessman, Gerald Panchaud, who, with his brother, owned, amongst other properties, the Tulchan estate near Inverness. On the walls of

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Panchaud's home, Tulchan Lodge, were several gold embellished guns by Wilkes, displayed prominently in illuminated mountings.

Mr Panchaud and his brother had been major landowners in the Highlands for several years. Indeed, when they first acquired their properties in the mid-seventies, the issue of foreign investors such as them acquiring large tracts of Scotland was sufficiently alarming to local interests for questions to be raised in Parliament. Mr Panchaud's name was known to Wilkes, but they had never met. They had been told by the dealer that he was acting as the Duke's financial advisor and agent. Most of the invoices to the Duke, which had all been settled by payment drawn on Windsor Star Trust accounts, had been made out in Mr Panchaud's name. These invoices were never posted to their addressee; they were always handed to the dealer for onward delivery.

The customer who came into the shop was curious to know where these guns that Mr Panchaud was displaying had come from. It was not the done thing to discuss one customer's business with another, especially not in this instance where fear of compromising the Duke's identity loomed large, so the customer left the shop none the wiser. Before the Wilkes had the opportunity to raise with the dealer the issue of how the Duke's guns came to be on the wall of Mr Panchaud's home, events took a more dramatic turn.

15222, the gun that led to the revelation of the fraudulent provenances.

In May 1987 Wilkes took a call from a major London maker with whom they had close personal contacts. A customer of the other firm had brought in a Wilkes gun, no 15222, strikingly embellished with white gold birds and a prominent line at the breech in the same alloy. He had very recently bought it privately on the understanding that it had been the property of an Indian nobleman for many years. The call to Wilkes was to check the feasibility of this provenance and to ask what Wilkes would charge to make a similar gun. Wilkes confirmed that the gun, which as the other maker had already spotted, had been proved in 1985 and had been but recently delivered to a customer who was certainly not Indian. They confirmed they would charge under half the amount the new owner had paid to make a similar gun. Wilkes had in fact invoiced the Windsor Star Trust £8,000 for gun 15222 that very same month.

On 2nd June they received a long letter from Gerald Panchaud, writing from Switzerland. On the assumption that Wilkes would never have heard of him, he introduced himself as the owner of the entire collection of over 150 firearms. He too was very well acquainted with the dealer who had represented himself to Panchaud as having access to a sale of assets from the estate of the late Duke of Windsor, assets that included a collection of a great many fine and embellished guns and rifles assembled on behalf of the Duke over the years. The dealer had told him that other similar specimens were also available that were in the estate of an Indian Maharajah. Mr Panchaud had been persuaded to allow the dealer to act as agent on his behalf to acquire as many of these as possible as an investment, the provenance of these meaning they would command a premium price. Mr Panchaud had been accumulating a steady stream of guns and rifles over a decade or more, paying for them with money paid into the plausibly named "Windsor Trust". He held a police licence as a Registered Firearms Dealer, but allowed his agent, the dealer, to maintain the register of arms held that is a requirement of such a licence.

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The purpose of his letter was to check the provenance of the guns and rifles that Wilkes had supplied in the light of a recent incident in which he had sold one of the guns to a friend who had seen it on display at his house. After the friend had checked its provenance and value Mr Panchaud was obliged to take the gun back, and was now much concerned that his entire collection had been acquired on the basis of false provenances, and that the dealer had been charging him inflated prices. He asked specifically that Wilkes confirm the provenances of the seven Wilkes guns that were then in Switzerland, the only ones in the collection whose details he could access at the time of writing, specifically asking whether or not these guns could have been, as he had been told, in the estate of the late Duke of Windsor. He concluded by saying that he needed to know if he could still have confidence in the dealer.

One of the most striking guns sold to the collection was this newly made gun, oddly numbered 1938, seen here on its black leather case and in close up. It was sold to the collection for £9,000 in 1983.

The Wilkes brothers were not noted for their speed of reply to correspondence, but Mr Panchaud's letter received a reply by return; a reply which after expressing confusion and dismay at the turn of events, describes the promise of confidentiality that Wilkes had been bound by. They confirmed that all of the guns specified were of recent manufacture and had been commissioned by the dealer as were the others supplied to the Trust. The letter pointed out that all of the recently made or re-barrelled guns had date stamps amongst the proof marks on the barrel flats, a point that Mr Panchaud seemed not to have noticed. The letter concluded that the dealer seemed to have misled both parties, and offered the firm's profound regret at the turn of events and assistance in resolving the matter.

The day after this letter was sent, the dealer came into the shop and was confronted with the discovery of his fraud. He penned and signed a handwritten statement that confirmed that he had *"continually and deliberately misrepresented the facts…"* and "*that you (Wilkes) and your employees have never aided or abetted or assisted me in any way whatsoever nor have you been party to my actions and intentions…. I confirm it has been my deliberate intention to hide and conceal from you and your employees all my deceptions. I have acted alone in deceiving all parties concerned."*

A further letter from Mr Panchaud followed that described his decision not pursue the dealer through the courts, preferring to rely on a personal offer of restitution of some of the losses he had incurred through buying his collection at inflated prices. He concluded that he hoped that inflation in value over time would restore the rest of his losses. In October 1987 he made his only visit to 79 Beak Street. Tom described him sitting in the shop with his head in his hands, musing over his own gullibility as they recounted to one another their respective sides of the story.

The identity of the "Duke", the Royal patron that Tom thought was his customer was one of the more inventive aspects. The 2nd Duke of Connaught had been in reality a member of the Royal family. His grandfather, Prince Arthur, the third son of Queen Victoria, had been appointed to the

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title of Duke of Connaught and Strathearn in 1874. By the time he died in 1942 at the age of 91 after a lifetime of public service, his son had pre-deceased him. His grandson, then aged 28, therefore succeeded to the title as the 2nd Duke. He would indeed have been in his seventies in the 1980s whilst the collection was being assembled for him, and by then fading eyesight might well have required the gold embellishment to focus on, had he not died in Canada in bizarre circumstances in 1943. The Dukedom became extinct on his death. Had either John or Tom been a little less diligent at keeping the identity of their collector secret, it is more than likely that someone would have pointed out in the previous ten years that they were making all these arms for someone long since deceased.

The fraud on Panchaud was carefully constructed to keep reference to the dealer out of the recorded transactions. Firearms sales in the UK generate significant paper trails; *i.e.* matching entries in dealer's police registers, VAT invoices and, when appropriate, export certificates. Most of those relating to the collection that survive appear to show Wilkes selling directly to Panchaud. The two parties had never met or been in contact. It was only the flow of money that passed through the dealer, presumably allowing him to accumulate a surplus in the Windsor Star Trust accounts which could then be siphoned off without trace when it suited him.

When the Tulchan collection came back for remedial work, some of the least appealing embellishment was on this 1950s Purdey OU. Wilkes actually proposed fitting new lockplates to undo the vandalism, but the cost was prohibitive and the gun went for sale as seen here.

Gerald Panchaud did not see his losses recouped by inflation. In May 1989, barely 18 months after his visit to the shop, he died. By then he and Wilkes had put steps in hand to remove all traces of false provenance from guns that had passed through the shop. Over 30 of the guns and rifles sourced from Wilkes came back to the shop. For most all that was needed was the removal of engraving from stock ovals, in some cases the ovals themselves being replaced. In a small number of instances heraldic symbols were inlaid in gold in the actions or on the levers and these needed more comprehensive rework, in two cases replacing the gold arms with an animal head. On bolt rifles where coverplates had been similarly embellished, these were replaced and engraved to match. This work was completed by early 1992, an invoice for over £2,000 for this work being settled by the Tulchan Estate in March. The executors of Mr Panchaud's estate subsequently put the entire collection up for sale at Christie's in a single sale devoted solely to it and held in London in March 1995. It was at this point that Christie's coined the title of the Tulchan Lodge Collection. The sale catalogue details 165 guns and rifles in 148 lots, but whereas single collection sales normally have a couple of pages of eulogy devoted to describing the origins of the collection and the background of the collector, this one, perhaps unsurprisingly in the circumstances, is completely silent on this subject.

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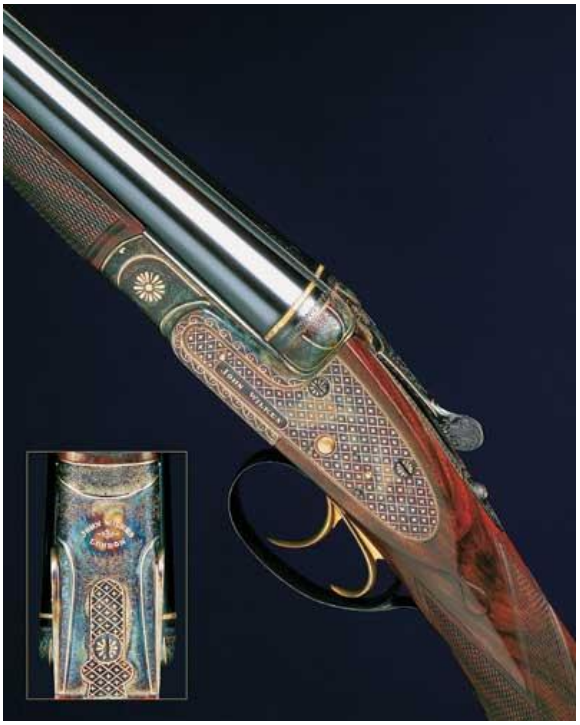
There were some very nice collectors' items in the sale with genuine provenance, for instance a pair of 10 bore Fosberry patent hammer rifles that really were made for the Nizam of Hyderabad fetched £26,000 and a nice looking pair of Purdeys made £36,000. Neither of these lots had been got at with added gold, but a good few in the catalogue had been given this treatment. An elegant Purdey 10 bore hammer rifle of 1860s vintage had wholly unnecessary gold lines inserted around the borders of the locks, action and hammers – it looked quite out of character and made only £2,800. Christie's did mention in the catalogue descriptions most, but not all, instances where embellishment had been added later. Top price in the sale was £40,000 for a Wilkes set of four new guns in a single flat case. In all 143 lots sold; the sale realising hammer prices totalling £830,000, nearer to the million mark when buyer's premium was added. Tom had advised the auctioneers not to put so many Wilkes guns into a single sale, but that was what the vendor wanted. Most of the 29 Wilkes guns in the sale sold apart from a single lot of a cased set of three small bore guns, although some of those that sold went for rather low prices.



Two guns in the sale had this unusual ornamentation of a grid of fine gold lines with small platinum fleur de lys in the spaces between. This one, 15246 was a 410; the companion gun was 12 bore. Both sold in the sale but the 12 bore was subsequently stolen from the purchaser whilst in transit.

From the way events unravelled there is no suspicion in my mind that the Wilkes brothers were party to the misrepresentation. Surviving records from the period are completely transparent on their dealings with the Windsor Star Trust. Documents detail the work they undertook, their input costs, their invoicing and VAT accounting and, for the several guns that were exported, the customs declarations reveal the time and manner of their export. Having spoken to them several times whilst the collection was being assembled and whilst the events that exposed the fraud were unfolding, I am certain that Tom and John were entirely unwitting participants in the process. They were just as shocked at the outcome as the victim, but it may not have seemed this way to others. The dealer's written apology and assurance that they were not a party to the building of the forged provenances was kept securely on file, but they did not find the opportunity to use this document at the time to any advantage.

Top price in the sale was for this garniture of modestly ornamented guns 13556,7,8,9. These were singleton 12 bore, 20 bore, 28 bore and 410, seen here in their impractical flat case. They made a hammer price of £40,000. Wilkes had sold them to the collection in 1983 for £31,000.

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Although the sale brought to an end the Tulchan Lodge saga, the story of the forged provenances reverberated around the trade for quite a while and tarnished the firm's reputation. John and Tom were certainly very naïve to take on the work. The dealer at the centre of it all was highly plausible in the role he had cast for himself, a necessary attribute for someone in his line of business, but he had a track record of some dealings of questionable integrity of which both Wilkes brothers were aware. They should have been much more cautious about adorning arms with heraldic symbols without asking what they represented or having any separately accredited authority for their use, and they should have been more curious about their patron, the Duke. Mr Panchaud was arguably even more naïve. As someone buying objects with which he was not very familiar emblazoned with heraldic insignia that were likewise unfamiliar to him, he should have sought some validation of what he was doing from an authority other than the party selling to him. Instead this was to happen by accident and ten years too late.

There were repercussions on the direction the business would take as a result of the amount of work expended on building the Tulchan collection. The work itself was profitable for Wilkes, but it consumed nearly all of the firm's capacity at making and refurbishing for a decade. This was at a time when other members of the trade were approaching Wilkes to take on work for them. Both Rigby's and Asprey's made such approaches and both were turned down because of the volume of work for the "Windsor Star Trust". If they had developed a more diversified customer base or built a solid relationship with another maker, the history of the firm might have evolved differently.

15194 was a typical example of the gold embellished guns made for the Tulchan collection. A 2 ¾" 12 bore it was sold to the collection in 1985 for £8,000. It came back in 1992 to have a spurious initial removed from the oval, but then made only £7,000 in the 1995 sale. It subsequently appeared twice more at auction before selling for £10,000 at Sotheby's in August 1999.

In the event, the Tulchan collection accounted for about 18% of the firearms made by Wilkes in the last quarter of the century. On the positive side, the period was one when highly ornamented guns were coming into fashion. Making the guns that were destined for the collection kick started Wilkes' return to new gun making. Amongst those made for the collection were some fine and rather unusual guns, the sight of which during manufacture undoubtedly helped Wilkes to make sales to other genuine customers. Wilkes were never short of orders for new guns thereafter, and many of these were finished in similar styles to those in the collection.

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The sale catalogue provides a unique reference to this period of Wilkes gunmaking. On seeing so many of their guns all offered together in a single sale, where the sheer volume on offer meant that some failed to attract the buyer interest and prices they deserved, it is easy to overlook the underlying quality of the guns they made. The Wilkes guns and rifles in the Tulchan Lodge collection represented some of their best work in this period, but the murky story behind it all too easily overshadows their gunmaking skill.

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Chapter 13 – Closure

By the end of 1995, both John and Tom had passed the age of seventy, and although both were in good enough health to keep the business going, conversation with them focussed increasingly on what its future would be. Although all three of their children and one of their nephews had at times worked in the shop, they had all decided independently that they did not want to make a career of running a gunmaking business, so the succession mechanism that had seen the firm through five generations of family ownership was not an option. Both brothers had always fought shy of allowing anyone outside the family to join the partnership so as they approached the time when they would want to give up work, there was no mechanism from within to ensure the continuity of the business.

In later years John was inclined to wear a hat whilst at work. This picture of him at the front bench, with Craig behind him is taken from the video that was made of the shop when it was nearing closure in 2000.

Many of the famous gunmaking names that had gone under in the twentieth century along with a few that had disappeared in the nineteenth were, by the 1990s, being resurrected under new ownership. The new owners often had little or no connection with the former businesses whose names they were now purchasing, and, in some cases, apparently little interest in them either. The names were sometimes being bought and sold just to give a hallmark of credibility. The name often brought with it a customer base made up of the owners of guns that bore it, some of whom would periodically surface posing difficult questions about them. These were an asset that was hard to turn into cash until the new firm was up and running and able to take on repairs to what the IT industry calls the installed base. Whilst a few of these new firms were keen to carry on traditional gunmaking, most were either seeking to import cheaper foreign made guns, or to begin the manufacturing of newly designed guns using the latest numerically controlled machine tools to eliminate some of the much time consuming and difficult handwork.

The Wilkes brothers had a number of approaches from individuals both from the UK and the United States who were interested in a partnership that would lead to them taking over the John Wilkes name. The approach from Asprey has already been mentioned. Another of these prospective partners let slip in conversation that it would be their intention to import Spanish guns bearing the Wilkes name, a proposal that both brothers, and particularly John, found completely unacceptable. John was adamant that he never wanted there to be a Spanish gun that bore his name. This attitude meant that whilst these approaches about partnership were cordially entertained, John and Tom both held serious reservations about them.

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Although they were still working at the bench throughout the 1990s, as the millennium approached both were in declining health. Tom had been diagnosed with, and successfully treated for, prostate cancer at the start of the decade and shortly thereafter was also found to have diabetes, which he kept under control through rigorous dieting. For many years Tom had been prone to mood swings in the shop, but by 2000 these were getting much more pronounced and a diagnosis of the early stages of Alzheimer's disease came as no great surprise to those that worked with him. John had also had a few episodes that could have been small strokes, which left him less physically able than he had been. With all these signs of advancing years the brothers eventually made the decision, after several false starts, to close the shop. Tom's son had emigrated to the US some years previously and had acquired property out there. The plan that the brothers developed was to move there to join him, whilst running a gun business in their spare time.

Having made the decision that they would retire, there began a very protracted process of running down the business, that focussed on completing as many as possible of the outstanding orders for new guns, whilst encouraging the owners of the hundreds of guns that resided almost permanently in the shop to take them away. Wilkes had seldom charged for storage, although they had usually charged for insurance in cases where customers, mainly those from overseas, had not made their own arrangements. In 1996 they wrote to all customers who had guns with them to alert them to their intent to start charging £100 per gun per year for storage. Whilst a good number ended up paying these fees, a majority responded as hoped and took their guns away, so that by the end of 1998 photographs show the racks around the shop, that had been so bewilderingly full in earlier years, to be quite empty. Several customers, including the owner of a fine pair of Boss guns, proved uncontactable at the address on file for them. After taking legal advice, the firm went through a protracted formal process to try to contact each of the missing owners, at the end of which some guns, along with formidable storage bills, were reunited with their owners. A few remained and these were sold at auction, the firm holding the sales proceeds in a suspense account in case the owners eventually surfaced. Needless to say, one or two of them did just that.

As Wilkes focused their business much more narrowly in the run up to closure, the volumes of invoices declined from the 600 or so a year long term average to 300 per year in the mid-90s and to 120 per year after the millennium. Craig Whitsey, who had an established gunmaking business in Arundel, about 50 miles southwest of London, had been working in the Wilkes shop since 1970. For much of that time he had been spending three days a week in Beak Street and working the remainder of the time at his own workshop. As the date of closure approached, John and Tom were spending less and less time in the shop and Craig found himself taking on an increasing proportion of the considerable amount of work needed to shut the business down and clear the premises, as well as finishing off as much as possible of the outstanding repair and new gun making work.

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Before the premises were fully cleared there were two separate records made of the business and the shop that are now irreplaceable. The first was a set of pictures taken by English Heritage in November 1998. This organisation had heard of the impending closure of the last gunmaking business in central London to combine shop and workshop in the same premises. They took a series of excellent photographs of the shop and workshop, including detailed pictures of some of the machinery and tools. Unfortunately, they scrupulously excluded people from the photographs. Sadly, there had also been no attempt to clean up before they arrived, so accumulated dust and debris cover much of the equipment that is pictured. One of the photos catches the barrel rack in the upstairs workshop showing that in 1998 there were still a good number of un-jointed tubes, and filed and machined barrels waiting to be made up in to guns. This set of pictures serve as an aide memoire to what was there and how it was arranged in the 1990s, even if this snapshot in time was rather too late to capture the place when activity was at its most frenetic.

The second record is a video shot a year or two later as a speculative exercise by a company that was making short sample documentaries depicting Soho life. Although the video, which runs for about sixteen minutes, includes a few library clips of shooting, these last in total for no more than a few seconds; the majority of the film is taken up by John holding forth as only he could on the history of the firm and on the woes besetting the gun trade in general, whilst Craig explains the various steps in the making of a gun. Tom makes a fleeting appearance in coat and hat, having clearly forgotten that the video was being shot on that particular day, and equally clearly wishing not to be part of it. Near the end John explains the decision to close the business and announces with certainty the brothers' intent to move to America once this is done. Whereas the English Heritage photos are rather clinical, the video is a very poignant reminder of the firm and the people who ran it.

Just before the business wound up there was one final discussion about continuing the business. Karl Lippard, an American with an expert knowledge of machine tools, had a goal to build an U&O gun to best quality standards using the most sophisticated machinery available. He had several discussions with the Wilkes brothers whilst his gun was in the design phase, and in particular they helped him with issues like the jointing of a superimposed action, suggesting he copy the circular draws from the Boss gun, and with aspects of the shape and proportion of the action and the locks. There are distant echoes here of the London Line lessons their grandfather had taken from Edwin Hodges. The design and the engineering were however entirely down to Mr Lippard. After some time, a tentative agreement was reached that Mr Lippard would make some of his guns bearing the Wilkes name. A block of numbers in the Wilkes sequence were reserved for these guns, which would be sent to Craig for submission to London Proof, before returning to the US for finishing. Messrs Lippard and Whitsey were expecting to proceed with making these guns after the closure of the Beak Street shop.

The machine tools in the basement, including the barrel boring bench, which had been bought from Woodward 55 years previously, were given to the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds. They arrived to collect them with a van and six men who manhandled the objects up the cellar steps. The remaining machine tools from the basement were either sold or broken up for scrap. The basement also held enormous stocks of rifle parts, most left over from the war years which were either sold or sent for scrap. And in one corner, by the hole in the cellar wall created by years of gun and rifle testing, was a metal cupboard that contained all of Uncle Tom's annual compendia of original documents, job tickets, copy orders, invoices and letters, all sorted by date and assembled in bundles, one for each of the firm's financial years; all of them covered in a thick layer of brick dust. A selection of these documents has been preserved, but the sheer volume of them meant that many more were discarded.

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Craig Whitsey was asked to carry on the firm's business as best he could from his Arundel workshop. He was to finish off the guns left incomplete at the time of the firm's closure. Some of these just required final finishing, but others were still at the barrel and action stage. Craig also undertook to offer maintenance and repair services to Wilkes guns, including the use of the Wilkes name on any new barrels he fitted. To allow him to do this Craig assembled a sizeable collection of tools and materials, along with all the partly finished guns, to be loaded in a van for the journey to Arundel.

The first floor workshop was a veritable treasure trove of tools and component parts for guns. There were vast quantities of these, some in easily accessible drawers and cabinets, many more in boxes under the benches. Just about everywhere that could have been used to store something had been used. The best of the tools and the most interesting and most useful parts, like John's grandfathers bow drill and the horseshoe cutter used to form by hand the joint pin on solid pin boxlock actions, along with all the best ornaments, the old guns and rifles still in stock and the cabinets from the front shop, were packed into a shipping container that was to be sent to the States to await the brothers' arrival. The bits that were left were mostly given away as souvenirs to friends of the firm.

John, with Tom behind, outside the shop on the day they vacated it in July 2003.

The clearance of the shop took months to complete but by the end of July 2003, the shop and workshops were entirely clear of anything useful. On the last day of the month the remaining bits and pieces were packed into various vehicles. 79 Beak Street's 78 years as a gun maker's shop were over. There are some photographs taken by Craig's cousin Toby Young as he and Craig drove away from the shop on this last day. John is wearing a three-piece pinstripe blue suit and the grey tweed hat that he sometimes wore whilst working at the bench. Tom is in a white summer jacket and white trilby; it was after all the middle of summer. Neither was obviously happy to be retiring.

The freehold of the shop had been sold, the new owners having plans to make major changes to it. But these were altered by the sudden interest of English Heritage in the fabric of the building. The removal of all of Wilkes equipment and furniture revealed a number of original features that had been hidden, the fireplace in the front upstairs workshops for instance, and the consequential preservation orders that were placed on the building severely limited the alterations that could be made.

John and Tom had been living together in a house on the south eastern outskirts of London for a number of years and it was to this house that they retired. From there they oversaw the administrative side of winding up the business. John increasingly took on the role of looking

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after his brother as his illness became more advanced. In the event, neither was in sufficiently good health to undertake the intended move to the US. The container holding all the best artefacts from 79 Beak Street arrived in the US without the brothers being there to unpack it. The whereabouts of its contents are now unknown.

After a few years Karl Lippard duly finished a prototype gun. Its barrels, which were not appreciably heavier than a pair of conventionally jointed tubes, were cut out of a single billet of steel in a 60 hour non-stop machining operation. They jointed perfectly into the action. The prototype was sent to Craig Whitsey who submitted it to London Proof which it passed. In anticipation of success in this endeavour, Mr Lippard started to give some publicity to the new Wilkes gun on a website. When the Wilkes brothers, who had expected they would be in the States to keep in touch more easily with what was going on, became aware that guns bearing their name were now close to being marketed they became very agitated. They appeared to have a very different recollection from Mr Lippard's of what had been agreed. He quickly decided to seek alternative branding for his gun rather than get into a dispute and the proposal to use the Wilkes name was dropped. This is why there was at least one U&O gun finished, possibly more, that bears the name of John Wilkes.

John and Tom in retirement

Shortly after this episode, in 2007 both brothers paid a visit to Craig Whitsey in Arundel. They had been in telephone contact with Craig in the years since the shop closed, but they were keen to discuss the finishing of the remaining guns in person. Both had given up driving by then so they hired a cab for the day for the 60-mile journey from Kent. John was very much his usual self, but Tom was very subdued that day and was not making many contributions to the conversation.

In early 2009 Tom had a fall at the house. He was admitted to a hospital nearby for treatment to his injuries. Complications developed and on the afternoon of 25th March 2009 Thomas Frederick Wilkes, a master gunmaker of quite extraordinary skill, died at the age of 83. His funeral on the 15th April was held in the parish church in Farnborough, Kent, a peaceful setting right on the edge of the sprawl of London, overlooking downland. John was there, quite desolate at the loss of his brother whom he had been looking after for so long, but despite his grief still managing to be as sociable as ever to other mourners. After a cremation ceremony, Tom's ashes were interred in this same churchyard, alongside those of his wife who had predeceased him by more than 35 years.

John became increasingly housebound in the months that followed his brother's death. I had a number of long telephone calls with him in this period. He was still recounting his favourite stories of the trade, his memory of them undimmed. Despite all the difficulties he had experienced looking after Tom, his grief at losing his brother pervaded the conversation, but he still managed to summon the underlying cheerfulness and humour that had been his hallmark over the years. Age related disorders were taking their toll on his health and towards the end of 2009 when he was having increasing difficulty looking after himself he went to stay with his younger sister, Louise, at her home in the West Midlands. A combination of infections and circulatory deficiencies caused his health to decline. In March of 2010 he was admitted to hospital near his

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sister's home and there on the 14th April 2010 John William Harrison Wilkes died, a month short of his 86th birthday.

John's funeral, which was held on the 8th May, had been meticulously planned by John himself, but the onerous task of putting his plans into practice fell to his daughter. A magnificent horse drawn hearse carried his brass handled coffin from the house to the parish church where his parents were buried at West Wickham in Kent. The mourners were all given carnations for their buttonholes. After the service, at which John's brother-in-law, Louise's husband, gave the eulogy as he had for Tom barely a year earlier, John was interred in the same grave as his parents, at the edge of the churchyard overlooking a meadow with the North Downs beyond. So passed London's last Gentleman Gunmaker; a craftsman and an extraordinary raconteur, whose many stories provided one of our last connections with Victorian gunmaking.

John taking a break during the final clearing of the shop in July 2003

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Chapter 14 – Conclusion - A Century of Change

Having told the story of John Wilkes' gunmaking business, particularly the London business which ran from 1895 to 2003 we can ask why is it that they were successful in trading throughout the 20th century whilst so many of their contemporaries went under during this tumultuous period for the trade? There are several reasons.

The first of these is the pure luck of family succession. Each generation of the Wilkes family was fortunate enough to give birth to someone in the next who had both the will and the aptitude to succeed to the business and make it prosper. In the Wilkes case, Joseph, the nineteenth century pistol maker had two sons who gave birth to the business. The elder, Joseph, provided the blood line, but he turned out to be a wastrel; it was his younger brother John who set up the action making business in Birmingham that provided the nucleus of professional competence around which one of his nephews was to build the London business. That nephew, John Wilkes, in turn had three sons amongst his six children, but only two of these wanted to stay in the business, and only one, Jack Wilkes, had the professional competence to carry it on. His brother Tom's contribution was as an obsessive record keeper, to whom this history owes much, but who, at the time, may have been seen as slightly annoying. Jack in turn had two sons, both of whom entered the business but, following his death, it was to be on his younger son Tom that it depended for its survival. His brother John, for all his many qualities, could not have run the business without Tom's skill at the bench and his business acumen.

So the survival of family businesses depends not just on having a following generation willing to carry on the trade; there has to be someone in that generation with the aptitude to be a master man. Once the young governor decides he feels more comfortable in the office than at the bench, the writing is on the wall for the long term survival of the firm as a family business. The Wilkes family were fortunate to achieve this through four generations after pistol maker Joseph. Few other gunmaking families have had this longevity. Finally the closure of John Wilkes was forced because none of the next generation wanted to enter the firm so there was no-one in the family to take over when John and Tom retired.

The second factor that influenced Wilkes survival was their existence throughout their lifetime as either a business in private ownership of an individual from 1896, when John's partner withdrew, to 1927, and thereafter as a family partnership. They never took money from investors in return for a stake in the business so never had to worry about paying dividends or losing control to these investors in difficult times. Masters' book on Atkin, Grant & Lang[23] provides several examples of gunmaking businesses, albeit bigger ones than Wilkes, going under because of shareholder interests. This absence of external involvement allowed the firm to survive during some years of very low profitability. Net income in real terms scarcely increased at all between 1938 and 1967, but Jack and his brother were taking enough to live on out of the business and they were paying for much of that time average, but not generous, wages to Jack's two sons. Shareholders, had there been any, would not have tolerated so long a period of low returns.

A third factor was flexibility. Many of the larger gunmaking firms had just one business; they made guns, they serviced them and when they wore out or became obsolete, they replaced them. In difficult times, they looked for markets in different parts of the world, but the business stayed the same. Wilkes, as the previous chapters should have shown, were forever adjusting what they did to provide guns and workshop services where demand was greatest and to source these from where supply was most readily available. This meant constant changes between retail gunmaking and trade work; between making guns and servicing and alterations; between buying in

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completed guns from the trade and making in-house. These changes were essential to keeping Wilkes afloat, and they add the richness to the story of their existence.

A fourth point concerns the management of costs and particularly the cost of maintaining a front shop in Central London. Wilkes first premises on the first floor in Lower James Street would have had few pretences of being a retail shop at all. The brass name plate described the firm as a "Gun and Rifle Manufacturer". It was, in all probability, first and foremost a workshop in which customers could be entertained at a pinch and if really necessary. The subsequent premises were all identifiable as shops, but the workshop purpose would have dominated their design and staffing. Even when Wilkes had people manning the front shop, this was only a job they did in their spare time, there were never staff or much in the way of cost devoted to dealing with retail customers. In the 1970s there were anxieties around the rising rents for retail premises in Central London and, had these been applied to Beak Street, they would probably have forced the closure of the firm. John and Tom certainly anticipated that would happen. The ability to purchase the freehold not only provided the business with an appreciating asset against which it could borrow, it also insulated it from the increasingly unaffordable rents for retail shops that were gradually forcing many of Wilkes' competitors either to move out of Central London or, more often, out of business altogether.

When starting to write this account, it was an easy assumption that there were a thousand or two owners of Wilkes guns, some of whom might be interested in reading it. In going through the preliminary research, these assumptions changed quite dramatically. There were actually only a little over three thousand identifiable John Wilkes guns and rifles made using the serial numbers between 4000 and 16000, the numbers that span the firm's production, and many of these were rather low grade trade guns that may not have survived. Add to these the Wilkes collectors who may own more than one Wilkes gun and it soon becomes apparent that there may be only a very few hundred owners of guns bearing the name of John Wilkes that may have any interest in the firm's history.

But as the story of the firm has unfolded, and new levels of complexity have appeared, it has become apparent that the story of John Wilkes embraces many aspects of the wider history of the London and Birmingham gun trades in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Outside the larger makers with their own factories, like Purdey, Holland and Boss, Wilkes carried on business in a way that was typical of that used by many of the smaller makers. Their story becomes that of a large part of the London trade, and because of the details in Wilkes' records, we have through them a window into a trade whose practitioners and practices are now almost lost from living memory, but whose products survive in the gun cabinets of enthusiasts around the world.

Epilogue

The production of new John Wilkes guns did not stop entirely with the firm's departure from Beak Street in July 2003. Three guns, a single 12 bore, (15502) and a pair of 20 bores (15491/2) awaited final finishing and freeing, and these were delivered to their customers by Craig Whitsey from his Arundel workshop in the years immediately following the shop's closure. Later still Craig also finished a best .410 boxlock with chopper lump barrels, no 15384, for a customer that had been at the

15384, the Wilkes 410 boxlock finished by Craig Whitsey.

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barrel and action stage when the shop closed. Craig still has a few other similar boxlock actions at this stage, which he can finish to order. In 2014 Craig's workshop still carries on the door the brass nameplate of John Wilkes, made to advertise his business to his customers in Lower James Street in 1895.

The final sidelock gun, also a .410, and unfortunately bearing the same number 15502 as the last 12 bore sidelock, was stocked and in the white when the shop closed. This is now the property of Malcolm Appleby, who adorned it in 2013 with one of his completely original engraving designs depicting interpretations of the anatomy of a dragonfly on all surfaces, and bearing the John Wilkes name on the fore end iron. If the brother's wishes about the future of the firm and its name are honoured, this will be the last in a long line of sporting guns to do so.

The dragonfly gun, 15502, pictured above in the white as it was when in left Beak St in 2003. To the left is the same gun awaiting final finishing after Malcolm's carving and engraving

Above and right, the finished gun. Finished for Malcolm by Michael Lingard

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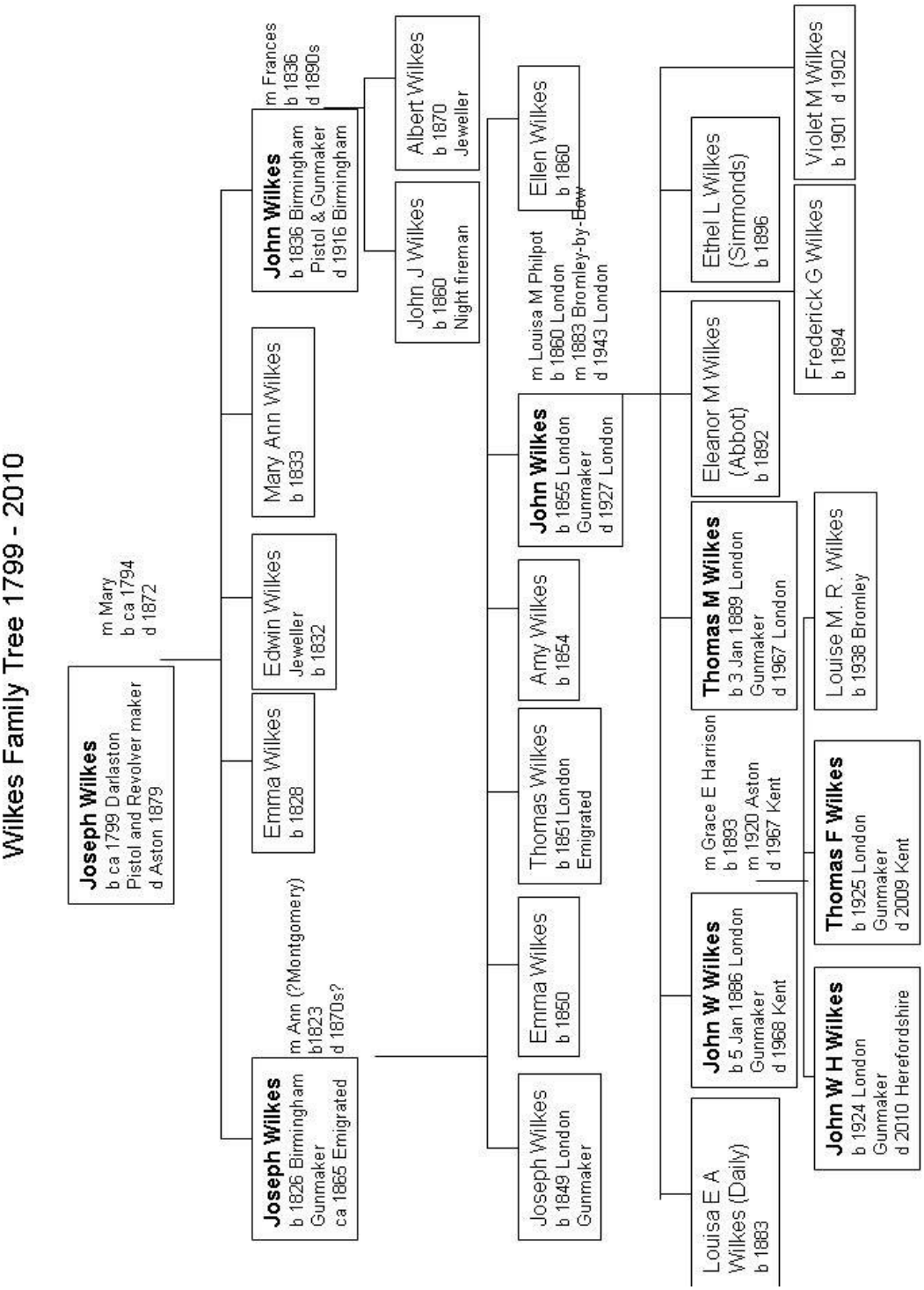
Appendix 1 – Simplified Wilkes Family Tree



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Appendix 2 - John Wilkes Gun Register & Numbering

The register of new guns made by John Wilkes is made up of two books of pre-printed stationery, each of quarto size, bound in leather and cloth, with the short side running up the spine. Each double page has a row of printed column headings, beneath which there are 23 lines for entering the details of guns made, one per line. In some cases Wilkes have entered 24 specimens per page by using the bottom margin, in many more cases there are fewer than 23 entries corresponding to firearms made because reserved numbers that occupied lines on the page were sometimes unused in practice.

The diligence of record keeping in the register varied, both in terms of the completeness of the entries for particular guns, and sometimes in the existence of any record at all. Between the start of the first register book in 1895 until 1940 there is usually some record of each one made, albeit on many occasions rather sparse entries. There are a few missing entirely in this period and these tend to be better quality examples sold to retail customers. After 1940 and right through to 2003, when manufacturing was in much lower volume and largely performed in London, only a proportion of those made were given any entry at all and these were frequently incomplete.

As the registers were printed for the trade at large, the column headings were not always matching what a particular maker would wish to record. There follows a list of these headings with a brief account of what Wilkes used them to record. They appear below exactly as in the registers, both of which have the same column headings. Some of them are rather archaic even for 1895, for instance the column headed “Fire” to indicate the type of ignition, suggesting the books were purchased together in the second half of the 19th century. It is unsurprising that Wilkes chose to use these columns in ways that sometimes differed from the printed heading.

Number.
Used to record the number. In almost all of the records these advance strictly sequentially, except where there are significant gaps which are noted.

Quality.
In the early years this column was occasionally used to denote a best quality specimen. From around 1900 there were some entries that indicated the makers model number of bought in arms, and from 1910 onwards the column was mainly used to indicate where proved, either London or Birmingham, with the abbreviations LP and BP.

System.
This column was used routinely to indicate the type of action. Boxlocks were always A&D, sidelocks were sometimes also referred to as Rogers to indicate the common type of action cocked by lifters pivoted in the bar. Back action sidelocks were usually referred to as Backwork, and Hammer actions and Bolt Actions were called by those names. An oddity is the use of the term Lefaucheux to describe a few of the Jones underlever guns that Wilkes made.

Bore
Used as expected to record bore of guns and cartridge sizes of rifles

Length of Barrels.
Used as expected to record length in inches.

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Barrels' Weight in Rough.
Not used as per heading but used regularly to record the material used for the barrels, their type of construction and sometimes their source.

Barrels' Weight Finished.
Used consistently to record finished barrel weight in pounds and ounces.

Total Weight.
Used consistently to record weight in pounds and ounces.

Handle.
This term which, although self-explanatory, has now been replaced by hand or grip, and was used to indicate the form of the stock. In the early years, the word "Plain" was entered to denote a straight grip, this being replaced by "Straight" around 1900. In later years this column was only used if the stock had any form of pistol grip, otherwise no entry indicating a straight hand.

Fire.
For the first 15 years of the firm's existence this column was filled with a capital C for every gun produced. Thereafter this column marked the beginning of list of text entries that described *inter alia* the features of the gun, the style of the action and the head of the stock, its internal mechanics, the boring of the barrels of guns, and sighting and charge of rifles, the engraving, fore-end catch type and ejector system. This normally covered all the columns up to but not including "Finisher".

Cartridge.
In the early years chamber length was inserted in this column but later these were entered elsewhere on the line as this column became part of the text string that began in the previous column.

Locks.
Very seldom used to describe lock type or make

SHOOTING.
This broad heading, which had subheadings for "Charge.", "Right Barrel.", "Left Barrel.", "Total.", "No of Cartridges Used." was intended to record pellet counts as a measure of the boring of the barrels. Only in a very few instances were chokes recorded in this way, they were normally recorded by nominal muzzle sizes.

Set.
A heading originally intended for stock measurements. These were sometimes included in or near this column but more frequently in the Buyer's name column.

Plungers, Heel Plates or Tips, and General Remarks.
Originally intended to record any unusual aspects of the furniture, this column was the last used for the general description of the arm.

Finisher.
This column was filled with coded entries that are an important clue to the original manufacturer in a great many cases.

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Date, &c., Finished.
This tended to be filled in only for bought in examples, and in these cases was usually the suppliers invoice date.

Date Sold.
The date of the sale invoice. This sometimes is the same as the date in the previous column or even a day or two earlier. Rarely, when firearms were held in stock for long periods, there are significant difference in the two dates.

Buyer's Name and Address.
For retail customers, there is usually a full name and often a postal address. Trade customers usually had more cryptic entries, X representing the dealer Whistler, and XX for Vaughan. Strangely this field is left blank in the early years.

Numbering and Approximate Dates of Sale

The following tabulation shows serial numbers against date sold and should help to date arms made by John Wilkes. As with many other makers guns were not sold strictly in number sequence, so tying a serial number to date of sale is only an approximate correlation. Prior to 1902, very few sale dates were recorded in the Register, so dating from serial number in this period is especially unreliable. For the large proportion of guns and rifles sold to dealers up to 1939, the sale date is when it went to the dealer. Significant gaps and other discrepancies are noted in the comments column.

Date or Date Range	Approximate Numbers	Comments
1895	4010 - 4090	Some overlap with late Dougall numbering.
1896	4091- 4220	Very few sale dates recorded in this period
1897	4221 - 4280	Very few sale dates recorded in this period
1898	4281 - 4360	Very few sale dates recorded in this period
1899	4361 - 4480	Very few sale dates recorded in this period
1900	4481 - 4548	
1901	4549 - 4659	
1902	4660 - 4771	
1903	4772 - 4920	
1904	4921 - 4988	
1905	4989 - 5058	
1906	5059 - 5129	
1907	5130 - 5230	
1908	5231 – 5293	
1909	5294 - 5405	
1910	5406 - 5509	
1911	5510 - 5433	
1912	5434 - 5872	Sales sequence very erratic in 1912/13
1913	5873 – 5910 8080 - 8123	5911 – 8079 not used*
1914	8124 - 8195	
1915 - 1918	8196 - 8376	Erratic sales sequence
1919	8377 - 8383	
1920	8384 - 8435	First guns made by Jack Wilkes in Birmingham

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1921	8436 - 9083	8506 -9005 not used. Erratic sales sequence
1922	9084 - 9151	
1923	9152 - 9174	Last guns made by Jack in Birmingham
1924	9181 - 9197	9175 – 9180, 9184 – 9190 not used
1925	9198 - 9766	9199 – 9208, 9242 – 9742, 9752 – 9764 not used
1926	9800 - 10138	9766 – 9799, 9855 – 9899, 9903 – 10100, 10111 – 10119 not used
1927	10139 - 10175	10152 – 10169 not used
1928	10176 - 10259	10183 – 10229, 10246 – 10250 not used
1929	10260 - 10385	10263 – 10274,10280 – 10300, 10307 – 10309, 10323 – 10342, 10372 – 10384 not used
1930	10390 - 12266	10386 – 10389, 10396 – 10420, 10447 -10449, 10463 – 10470, 10476 – 10524, 10527 – 10549, 10557 – 11000, 11003 – 11229, 11231 – 12126, 12128 – 12223, 12225 – 12253, 12258 – 12259 not used
1931	12267 - 13537	12288 – 13289, 13305 – 13405, 13412 -13511, 13515 – 13519, 13530 – 13534 not used
1932	13545 - 13582	13547 – 13550, 13578 – 13580 not used
1933	13583 - 13629	13583 – 13589, 13613 – 13624 not used
1934	13630 - 13690	13633 – 13642, 13648, 13653 – 13659, 13661 – 13672 not used
1935	13691 - 13809	13706 – 13709, 13728 – 13739, 13758 – 13774, 13791 not used
1936	13810 - 13963	13813 – 13862, 13916 – 13945 not used
1937	13984 - 14041	13964 – 13983, 13995 – 14009 not used
1938	14050 - 14082	14053 – 14066 not used
1939	15002 - 15079	14083 – 15001, 15016 – 15034, 15039 – 15049, 15052 – 15069, 15071 – 15075 not used
1940 – 1950	15080 - 15094	15087 – 15090 probably unused
1951 – 1960	15095 – 15099, 9023, 23359	Not clear if all were used
1961 – 1970	15102 - 15120	Not clear if all were used
1971 - 1980	15122 – 15180, 16279	Many gaps and numbers used out of sequence
1981 - 1990	15181 - 15272	Many gaps and numbers used out of sequence
1991 - 2003	15273 – 15502, 15830	Many gaps and numbers used out of sequence
2003 - Present	15384, 15491/2, 15502	

* “not used” refers to numbers that appear from the register not to have been applied to arms at the time. A small number of pre-1930 actions were finished or re-built in the 1960s and later and these were sometimes given previously unused 4 digit numbers. There were fewer than ten such instances. Other arms were finished in some cases retaining their action maker’s numbers, e.g. bolt rifles, W&S actions etc. These numbers usually lie outside the above ranges.

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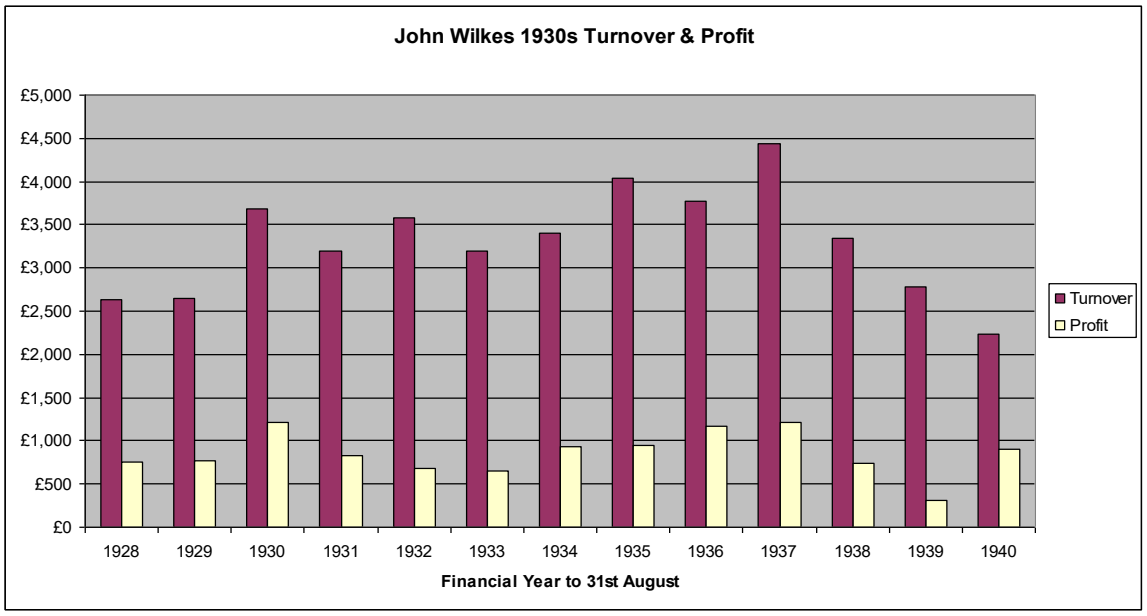
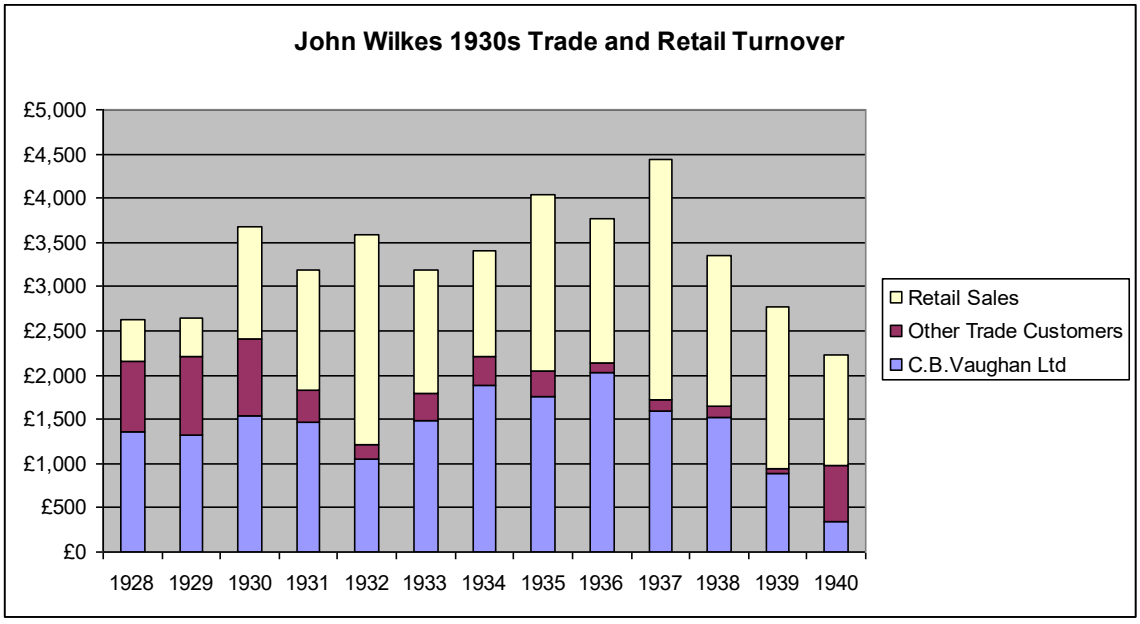
Appendix 3 – Turnover, Profit and Retail/Trade Sales

Appendix 3A – 1928 to 1940





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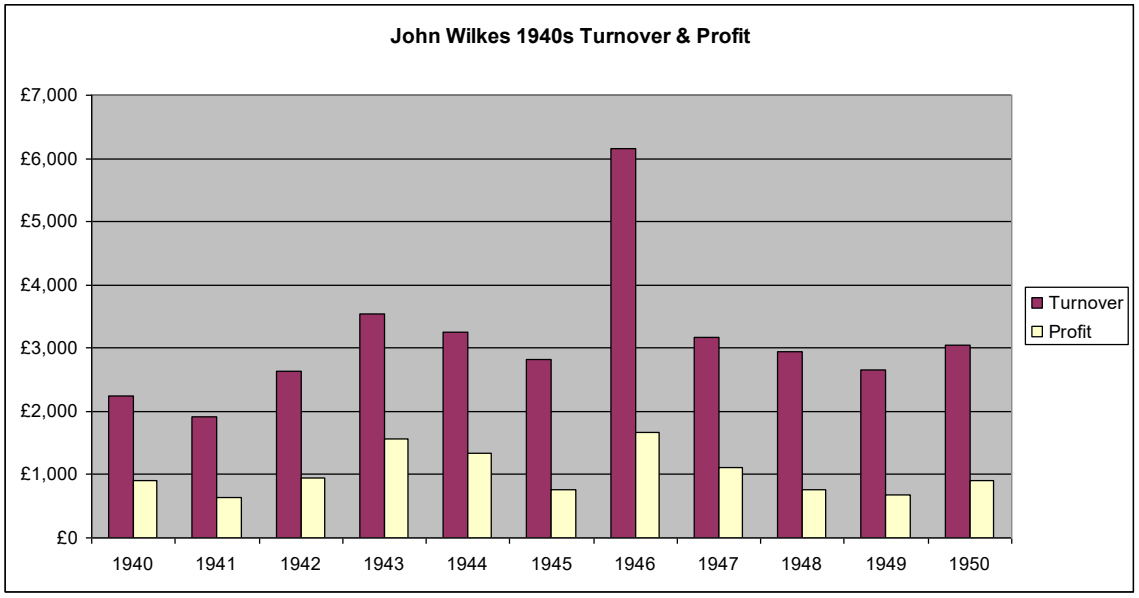
Appendix 3B – 1940 to 1950



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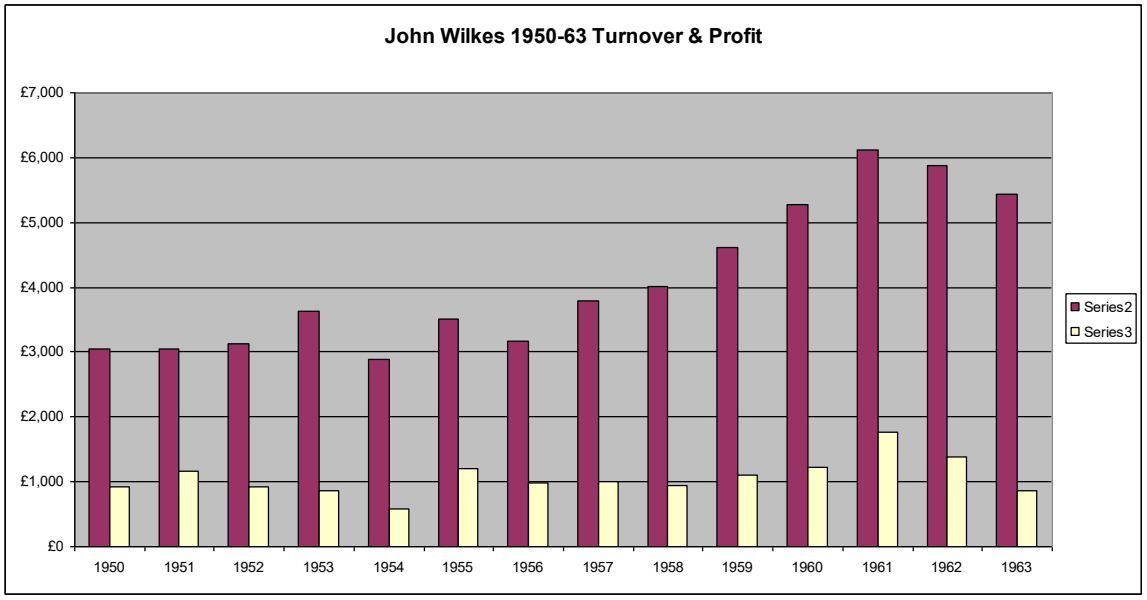
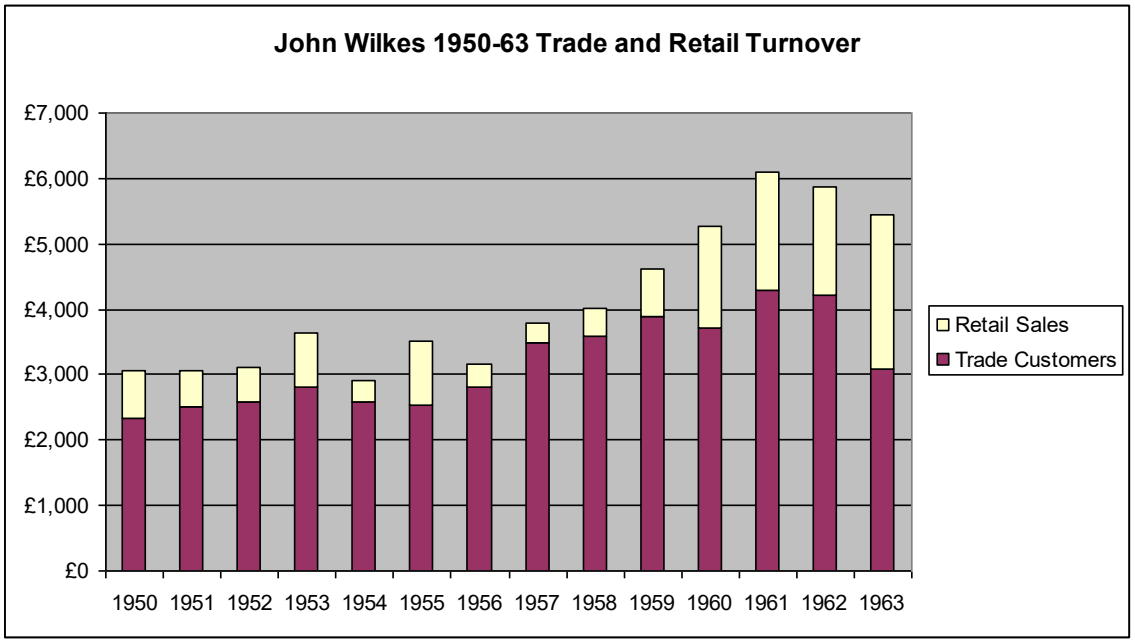
Appendix 3C – 1950 to 1963





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Appendix 4 – Guns Retailed by James Purdey & Sons

Number	Bore	Barrel Length	Total Weight	Stock Length	General	Finisher	Date Sold	Manufacturing costs and details	Sale transactions
12275	20	28"	5_9	14 3/4"	Scroll, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Rocker safe Southgate ejector	Bayliss	17/10/1934	Bought Bayliss 10/12/1930 for £13/0/0	Sold for £18/0/0 - register records sale to CBV in 1930 and returned
13590	.410	26"		14 3/4"	No 4 Scroll, Scott spindle, Anson rod, shoulders, Southgate ejector	Harper	19/01/1933	Harper 18/01/1933 .410 A&D ejector gun £13/0/0	Sold for £18/0/0
13591	20	27"	5_5 1/2	14 3/4"	No 4 Fine Scroll, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	08/03/1933	Bayliss 28/02/1933 20 bore A&D ejector gun £13/5/0	Sold for £18/0/0
13597	20	28"	5_5	14 3/4"	Scroll, Scott spindle, Anson rod, shoulders, Southgate ejector	Harper	08/08/1933	Harper 5/08/1933 bought for £13/0/0 plus 7/0 for setting and cutting up chequer.	sold for £18/0/0
13625	20	27"	5_7	12 1/2"	Scroll, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Rocker safe Southgate ejector	Bayliss	02/12/1933	Bayliss 1/12/1933 bought for £13/5/0	sold for £18/0/0
13626	20	27"	5_8	14 1/4"	Scroll, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Rocker safe Southgate ejector	Bayliss	06/12/1933	Bayliss 4/12/1933 bought for £13/5/0	sold for £18/0/0
13630	28	27"	4_14	14 5/8"	Scroll, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Rocker safe Southgate ejector	Bayliss	22/12/1933	Bayliss 21/12/1933 bought for £13/5/0	sold for £18/0/0
13632	12	28"	6_6		No extension, scroll, ball & bead,rocker safe, Anson rod, Scott spindle, Southgate ejector	Harper	24/01/1934	23/01/1934 Harper bought for £13/10/0, extra 11/0 for lengthening and adjusting boring.	sold for £18/0/0 plus 15/0 for alterations to stock and chokes.

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13649	16	28"	5_10	13 1/2"	Tang lever extension, scroll, ball& bead, Scott spindle, points, Anson rod, Southgate ejector	Wilkes, Finished Bayliss	27/04/1934	Bayliss 13/03/1934 completing from action and barrels £6/0/0	sold for £18/0/0
13678	12	28"	6_8		Boss Bite, Full fence, scroll, shoulders, anson rod, recoil pad	Harper	16/08/1934	Harper 27/08/1934 12 bore, Boss lever ejector gun in engraved state. £12/0/0	Sold for £18/0/0 plus £1/0/0 for recoil pad
13685	28	26"	4_12		No extension, border engraved, tumbler lever work, non-ejector, rod safety, plain head	Bayliss	29/11/1934	Bayliss 28/11/1934 28 bore non ejector £7/15/0	Sold for £10/15/0
13698	20	28"	5_14	13 1/2"	No extension, Ball & bead, scroll, points, Anson rod, recoil pad, Southgate ejector	Harper	19/09/1934	11/09/1934 Harper 20 bore A&D ejector gun £13/0/0 plus 4/6 for alterations to stock. Restocked by Harper 9/04/1934 for £1/15/0	Sold for £18/0/0 plus £1/0/0 for recoil pad.
13705	12	28"	6_6		No extension. Scroll, Action Mealey, Ball & bead, points, Scott spindle, rocker safe	Mealey, Bayliss	08/03/1935	Made up from parts in the shop. Bayliss 21/02/1935 Stocking and completing A&D action and barrels £5/2/0	Sold for £18/0/0 plus £2/0/0 for delivering blacked and in shooting state
13723	.410	26"	4_4	14 7/8"	No extension, Scott spindle, scroll, Anson rod, ejector, shoulders	Harper	24/11/1934	Harper 22/11/1934 .410 bore A&D ejector £13/0/0	sold for £18/0/0 plus £1/0/0 for recoil pad
13724	20	28"	5_9	14 7/8"	Hidden draw bolt, ball&bead, Scott spindle, scroll, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Harper	16/11/1934	Harper 12/11/1934 20 bore A&D secret bite ejector £14/10/0	Sold for £18/0/0 plus £1/0/0 for recoil pad
13741	20	26"	5_5	14 5/16"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	31/07/1935	Bayliss 22/07/1934 20/26" ejector £13/7/6.	sold for £18/15/0

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13787	12	28"	6_7	14 5/8"	Action Mealey, stocking Bolter, Scroll, Anson rod, rocker safe, Southgate ejector	Mealey, Bolter, Bayliss	30/03/1935	Made up from parts in the shop. Bayliss 25/03/1935 Finishing barrels, engraving, hardening A&D gun, £3/14/0	Sold for £18/0/0
13788	12	28"	6_5	14 5/8"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	19/09/1935	Bayliss 13/09/1935 12/28 A&D ejector £13/2/6	Sold for £18/15/0
13789	12	28"	6_5	14 3/4"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	29/11/1935	Bayliss 13/11/1935 12 bore A&D ejector £13/2/6	Sold for £18/15/0
13790	20	27"	5_6	13 9/16"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	18/05/1935	Bayliss 17/05/1935 A&D 20 bore ejector gun £13/7/6 plus 5/0 for better stock.	Sold for £18/15/0
13796	20	27"	5_7	14 1/2"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	31/08/1935	Bayliss 29/08/1935 20 bore ejector £13/7/6	Sold for £18/15/0
13797	20	27"	5_7	14 3/8"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	03/10/1935	Bayliss 30/09/1935 20 bore A&D ejector £13/7/6	Sold for £18/15/0
13881	20	26"	5_7	14 1/2"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	16/05/1936	Bayliss 14/05/1936 20 bore ejector £13/7/6	sold for £18/15/0
13882	20	26"	5_7	14 3/8"	Scroll, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	16/05/1936	Bayliss 14/05/1936 20 bore ejector £13/7/6	sold for £18/15/0
13991	12	28"	6_6		Paired with 13705	Bayliss	29/07/1937	Bayliss 26/07/1937 12 bore A&D ejector gun ££13/12/6, extra £1/0/0 to pattern to 13705.	sold for £18/15/0 plus £1/5/0 for pairing

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13994	12	28"	6_5	14 5/8"	Scroll, ball & bead, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	18/06/1937	Bayliss 16/06/1937 12 bore A&D ejector gun ££13/12/6	sold for £18/15
14011	20	26"	5_5	14 5/8"	Scroll, ball & bead, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	21/12/1937	Bayliss 17/121937 20 bore A&D ejector gun £14/7/6	sold for £18/15 on 19/01/1938
14022	12	28"	6_3	14 7/8"	Scroll, ball & bead, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	20/11/1937	Bayliss 28/10/1937 12 bore A&D ejector gun £14/2/6	sold for £18/15
14050	20	26" W&S	5_5	13 1/2"	Scroll, ball & bead, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	14/03/1939	Bayliss 31/01/1939 20 bore A&D ejector (£14/7/6) less barrels, machining and furniture (£1/19/2) £12/8/4	Sold initially to C.B. Vaughan, bought back for £20/0/0 and sold to Purdey for £18/15/0
14051	20	26" W&S	5_3	13 3/8"	Scroll, ball & bead, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	31/08/1938	Bayliss 30/08/1938 20 bore A&D ejector gun £14/7/6	Sold for £18/15
15078	16	27"	5_10	13 1/2"	Scroll, ball & bead, rocker safe, Scott spindle, Anson rod, points, Southgate ejector	Bayliss	27/07/1939	Bayliss 25/07/1939 16/27 A&D ejector £14/2/6	sold for £18/15.
15083	.410	26"			Ejector. No details recorded in register	Harper	16/08/1940	Harper 31/07/1940 .410 A&D ejector gun £17/0/0	Sold for £22/10 plus 15/0 for recoil pad

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Appendix 5 - Selected invoices for W.W. Dowding

The purpose of this appendix is not to give a complete list of all the sales to Mr Dowding. He was a customer who had both a passionate interest in shooting and fishing and the means to pursue that interest unstintingly. The selection of transactions in the following pages show the broad range of services that he called on his gunmaker to provide; for example, handling all the shipping arrangements when he went on shooting trips abroad. But they also show how he is constantly trying different guns and rifles and different ammunition, and repeatedly visiting the Shooting Grounds to try guns out. Three different rifles are imported from Belgium before he finds one he wants to keep. And he uses enormous amounts of cleaning products. There is some social commentary in there as well. He spends just £6 on a gun for his keeper, probably no more than two weeks of the man's wages, and then spends a few shillings more on having the gun marked as his property, presumably to stop the man selling it. Some of the transactions below relate to purchases of guns described in the text, but the majority cover the other paraphernalia necessary to pursue the sport as energetically as Dowding did.

Invoice of 31st March 1933

12 bore trapshooting gun No 13562 2½" chambers	£120	0	0
Special leather case	£5	10	0
Case cover with pouch	£4	10	0
Selvyt lined gun cover stamped with initials	£1	2	6
Stamping gun case and case cover with initials in monogram to special design	£1	1	0
Complete set of gun case accessories including funnel	£2	15	0
12 bore pigeon gun No 13561 2¾" chambers. Shooting adjusted to 25 metres	£120	0	0
Extra pair of barrels shooting adjusted to 31 metres	£30	0	0
Special leather case for gun and extra barrels	£6	5	0
Case cover with pouch	£5	5	0
Selvyt lined gun cover stamped with initials	£1	2	6
Stamping gun case and case cover with initials in monogram to special design	£1	1	0
Complete set of gun case accessories	£2	12	6
20 bore A&D ejector gun No 13560 2¾" chambers	£45	0	0
Special leather case, name stamped on lid	£4	15	0
Case cover stamped on ends	£3	2	6
Set of gun case accessories	£1	5	0
Extra canvas gun case stamped "F.E.W.D." *(Mrs Dowding's initials)*	£3	7	6
Gun by Churchill 4325. Overhauling, adjusting pulls & refinishing stock	-	-	-
U&O gun No 30190, lapping barrels and refinishing stock		10	0
Visit to west London Shooting grounds to plate guns	-	-	-
.250/.300 Mauser rifle 96397. Refinishing stock and chequering fore end	£1	5	0
2 4 oz. tins Young's cleaner		5	0
2 tins 3-in-1 oil		3	0
.30 bore DB rifle by Harrison & Hussey No 3371. Fitting anti-recoil heel plate and renovating stock. Re-blacking barrels. Engraving initials in cipher on oval. Supplying funnel for boiling out barrels.	£3	0	0
Leather magazine for fifty cartridges, initials stamped on lid	£2	2	0

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Gun by Canterini 1689. Lapping barrels. Fitting anti-recoil heelplate and adjusting bend and cast of stock to measurements	£2	5	0
Gun Churchill 4419. fitting new pair of 27" barrels game boring interchangeable with present 25" barrels. Converting to ordinary double triggers. Restocking to measurements.	£35	0	0
Gun Churchill 4419. Fitting new flat file cut top rib to 25" barrels. Reducing chokes to R imp cyl, L mod and regulating shooting. Re-blacking barrels	£3	0	0
Canvas case for Churchill gun 4419 and extra barrels with accessories including stamping	£4	0	0
20 .270 W.C.F. cartridges		9	0
500 12/7 Velocity cartridges	£3	12	6
20 .270 W.C.F. cartridges		9	0
12 bore A&D ejector gun No 13576 (for Mr S.R.W. Shaw)	£18	10	0
Leather case and accessories, initials stamped on lid	£3	10	0
500 12 bore Velocity cartridges (300/5, 200/6)	£3	12	6
1 all metal saddle shooting seat	£1	10	6
1-year subscription to Outdoor Life including postage	£1	2	6
100 20 bore 2 ½" Gastight cartridges 6 shot		16	6
1-year subscription to Sports & Field and Field & Stream including postage	£1	13	0
1 Gallon "Home Keeper"	£2	0	0
Leather case for Leeson rifle No 1352 with cleaning rod etc	£3	15	0
Stamping case with initials in monogram to special design		10	6
Engraving initials in cipher on oval in stock		2	6
Supplying cartridges and adjusting rifle to 50 & 100 yds. including range fees	£1	0	0
100 450/400 3¼" cartridges	£2	10	0
200 12 bore 2¾" Gastight cartridges 5 shot	£1	19	0
100 20 bore 2¾" Gastight cartridges 6 shot		18	6
4 Pigeon decoys		16	0
TOTAL	**£459**	**1**	**6**

Invoice of 31st March 1934

.22 Savage HP rifle 199651. Refinishing and chequering stock & fore end. Fitting anti-recoil heelplate	£1	10	0
450/400 DB rifle Leeson 1352. Fitting new back sight and 2 fore-sights. Refinishing stock. Removing sling eye. Cleaning off and re-blacking barrels	£2	5	0
12 bore SL ejector gun with extra pr of barrels (Gervais 28932) in white state. Boring barrels and regulating shooting. Finishing off barrels, 2 pairs. Making off finishing and chequering stock and fore end. Stripping preparing and polishing. Engraving (Purdey pattern) Hardening, freeing, assembling and regulating. Matting ribs of both barrels, inlaying "CHOKE" on one pair. Blacking.	£22	10	0

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200 12 bore 2 ¾" Gastight cartridges. Loaded 33<> 1 1/16 7	£1	19	0
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds)			
200 clay birds	£1	0	0
Ground & attendants		10	6
Duty paid on importation of .35 DB rifle from Jules Bury, Liege	£8	12	3
Stamp for clearing fee		1	0
1800 12 bore Velocity cartridges (300/8,100/4,400/5,500/6,200/10) Dispatched to Latheronwheel House, Special price @14/6	£13	1	0
2 tins Superfine Oilit		5	0
1 tin Young's cleaner		2	6
2 Valvespout oilers		4	0
1 quart Young's cleaner		6	6
1 quart Superfine Oilit		12	0
12 bore A&D gun by Leeson no 242 for Keeper	£6	0	0
Engraving oval "Gun for use of Keeper. The property of W.W. Dowding Esq."		3	0
Canvas case for same		15	0
200 12/6 British smokeless cartridges. Special price 10/6	£1	1	0
Carriage		2	9
12 bore A&D ejector gun No 12224	£35	0	0
Leather case and accessories, initial stamped on lid	£3	15	0
8 Rods. 1 Landing net in 3 cases. Repairing and renovating (Peck & Sons, at cost)	£2	16	6
Painting initials on case and lining ends in green & red. Fitting straps to long case. At cost		15	0
1 .22 MkII Webley air rifle No S793 at cost	£3	0	0
1 canvas cover for same at cost		3	0
Visit to West London Shooting Grounds for rifle practice		10	6
20 .35 Winchester cartridges		9	6
60 .270 Winchester cartridges	£1	17	9
Visit to West London Shooting Grounds			
100 cartridges		15	0
100 clay birds		10	6
Car to and from station		4	0
Ground & attendants		10	6
1 2 piece .270 rod and fittings		7	6
Bleaching and mounting 2 goat heads frontal at cost	£1	1	0
Morocco leather case for camera stamped with initials	£1	0	0
200 12 bore Trapshooting cartridges (100/6,100/7)	£1	7	0
Dispatched to John Lowie, Garvan, Carriage		3	0

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20 bore gun No 13560. Reducing chokes to Imp Cyl and Mod, regulating and shooting. Increasing cast off ¼".	-	-	-
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds) Mrs Dowding			
180 cartridges	£1	7	0
180 clay birds		18	0
Ground & attendants	£1	1	0
Postage on return of .35 rifle to Jules Bury, Liege		4	6
Packing case		3	0
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds) Mrs Dowding			
310 cartridges	£2	6	6
310 clay birds	£1	11	0
Ground & attendants	£1	1	0
400 20 bore 2¾" Gastight cartridges (100/6,300/7) Dispatched to Latheronwheel House.	£3	18	0
Gun Purdey 22654. Lapping barrels, repairing gun case		15	0
200 12/7 Velocity cartridges	£1	9	0
1 450/400 nickel plated funnel		5	0
1 12 bore nickel plated funnel		5	0
1 quart Young's cleaner		6	6
1 quart Superfine Oilit		12	0
1 doz packets Hellis' patches		12	0
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds) Mrs Dowding			
230 cartridges	£1	14	6
230 clay birds	£1	3	0
Ground & attendants	£1	1	0
1 270 rod and fittings		7	6
1 303 rod and fittings		7	6
1 Tube Canisid		1	0
Pair guns Boss 6525/6. Stripping and cleaning. Re-soldering short rib of 6525. Cleaning off and re-blacking both pairs of barrels. Buffing up stocks.	£2	15	0
50 20 bore 2¾" Gastight cartridges 6		9	9
25 "20 Gauge" cartridges 7		3	0
Duty paid on importation of drilling from Jules Bury Liege	£8	13	2
Stamp for clearing fee		1	0
Mail canvas case for Drilling. Initials stamped on lid	£2	5	0
Leather bucket and sling		7	6
1 .35 rod and fittings		7	6
1 20 bore rod and fittings		5	6
1 tin Young's cleaner		1	6
1 tube Safetipaste		1	0
1 tube Canisid		1	0

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200 20 bore 2¾" Gastight cartridges 5	£1	19	0
300 12/6 Grand Prix cartridges	£2	0	6
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds) Mrs Dowding			
100 cartridges		15	0
100 clay birds		10	0
Ground & attendants		10	6
500 12/6 Velocity Cartridges	£3	12	6
Packing case and postage on return of Drilling to Jules Bury, Liege		7	6
1 12 bore cleaning outfit		10	6
1 Mk II new pattern Webley air rifle with special stock, at cost	£3	10	0
Canvas case for same, at cost	£1	5	0
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds) Mrs Dowding			
75 cartridges		11	3
75 clay birds		7	6
Ground & attendants		10	6
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds) Mrs Dowding			
75 cartridges		11	3
75 clay birds		7	6
Ground & attendants		10	6
Visit to RSG (Regent Shooting Grounds) Mrs Dowding			
200 cartridges	£1	10	0
200 clay birds	£1	0	0
Ground & attendants	£1	1	0
200 20 bore 2¾" Gastight cartridges 5	£1	19	0
Fitting new pair of straps to double case (Boss guns)		5	6
Duty paid on importation of 9.3 mm rifle no 8005 from Jules Bury Liege	£8	10	3
Stamp for clearing fee		1	0
Altering case to take 9.3 mm rifle		4	0
Refinishing stock and re-cutting chequer hand and fore end, Inlaying W.D. in gold in diamond of fore end.	£1	10	0
1 Mk IV Webley .22/.38 Webley revolver No 41688	£6	0	0
100 9.3x74R Sinoxid cartridges	£2	0	0
TOTAL	**£198**	**15**	**8**

Invoice of 31st August 1935

At the end of their 1935 financial year Wilkes submitted an immensely long invoice covering some seven pages in the ledger to W.W. Dowding. It had 107 line items and totalled £316/4/0. It included the .410 and 16 bore new guns which together cost £150, leaving the remaining 105 items to make up £166, an average of just over £1/10/0 per item. Many of these items are similar in type to those above, but some of the more unusual items include: -

The supply of a silver cup, making a black wood plinth and mounting the cup and a silver name plate on it and engraving both, costing just under £3 in total.

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Greasing and packing a collection of 4 guns and rifles in a case for shipment to Hungary, and cleaning and overhauling same on return, including the supply of 4 Hungarian and one Austrian shooting licence and arranging insurance for the trip. Similar services supplied for a second trip during the year.

Supplying three ½oz bottles of fishing reel oil and 2 worsted finger stalls imported from vom Hofe in New York.

Cleaning and checking two guns after use in wet weather.

Invoice of 31st August 1936

This was the last unusually large invoice to Mr Dowding and includes the "finest quality" pair of guns and all their accessories.

300 Tom Tom (Wilkes own brand) cartridges 12/6	£2	0	6
Renovating stocks of pair of Boss guns 6525/6		10	0
Repairing double case		10	6
Renovating stock of Wilkes gun 12224		5	0
200 16 bore GP cartridges 6	£1	7	0
Examining and cleaning after shooting Wilkes gun 13793 and Bury rifle	-	-	-
.256 MS rifle 9985 with telescopic sight	£17	10	0
Supplying cartridges and testing shooting, setting telescopic sight at 100yds	£1	5	0
Renovating, shortening stock ¼" and fitting recoil pad	£1	10	0
Full length mail canvas case, initials F.E.W.D. stamped on lid	£2	17	6
256 cleaning rod and fittings		7	6
I tin Superfine Oilit		2	3
1 tin Young's cleaner		2	0
1 tube Saftipaste		1	0
Make up pair of 9.3x74 snap caps		6	0
100 16/6 GP cartridges		13	6
100 12 bore Two Inch cartridges		17	0
50 9.3x62 S/M cartridges	£1	5	0
50 9.3x74 S/M/ cartridges	£1	5	0
50 256 MS cartridges		15	0
150 12/5 Tom Tom cartridges	£1	0	3
Greasing and packing 3 guns and 3 rifles for voyage to Hungary	£2	5	0
5 packing cases	£1	5	0
6 Hungarian licences	£3	7	6
Fee for Roumanian visa		12	0
Placed in case with gun 13793			
I tin Superfine Oilit		2	3
1 tin Young's cleaner		2	0
1 packet Hellis patches		1	0
Placed in case with Boss guns			
I tin Superfine Oilit		2	3
1 tin Young's cleaner		2	0
6 packets Hellis patches		6	0
Placed in case with 9.3 Mauser			
I tin Superfine Oilit		2	3

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1 tin Young's cleaner		2	0
100 12/5 Tom Tom cartridges		13	0
Stripping, overhauling and cleaning 2 guns and 2 rifles on return from Hungary (remaining gun and rifle not used)	£1	10	0
Cleaning after shooting Wilkes gun 13793	-	-	-
Erasing oval and engraving crest and inscription on Wilkes gun 13793		5	0
Making and inlaying 18ct gold letters F.E.W.D. in stock	£1	10	0
Shortening stock ¼", refitting recoil pad and renovating stock		10	6
Mail canvas case for Gervais gun with extra barrels stamped W.W.D	£2	18	6
Cleaning rod and fittings		7	6
I tin Superfine Oilit		2	3
1 tin Young's cleaner		2	0
1 pair snap caps		5	0
Cleaning after shooting Gervais gun	-	-	-
Mounting pair of deer horns	£1	0	0
Plate and inscription		4	0
Fitting face pad in stock of gun 13793		15	0
5 Hungarian licences	£2	16	3
Austrian permit		12	6
A pair of A&D ejector guns 13952/3 in case complete with accessories	£80	0	0
Extra for gold letters inlaid in stocks	£2	5	0
Extra for case cover	£2	12	6
Visit to West London Shooting Ground with Mrs Dowding			
2 practice	£1	1	0
100 cartridges		14	0
100 clay birds		10	6
Visit to West London Shooting Ground			
practice		10	6
100 cartridges		14	0
100 clay birds		10	6
100 .256 MS S/M cartridges	£1	10	0
Supplying and fitting telescopic sight to .242 Vickers rifle 4021	£10	0	0
Full length mail canvas case, initials stamped on lid	£2	18	6
Canvas cover with detachable sling, stamped W.W.D.	£1	5	0
1 .242 cleaning rod and fittings		7	6
1 tube Canisid		1	0
I tin Superfine Oilit		2	3
1 tin Young's cleaner		2	0
Canvas cover with detachable sling for .256 MS rifle stamped F.E.W.D.	£1	5	0
Leather sling case for telescopic sight		17	6

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Fitting telescopic sight case in rifle case		4	6
1 rubber shoe for .256 rifle		6	0
Greasing and packing 3 guns and 2 rifles for voyage to Hungary	£1	17	6
4 packing cases	£1	0	0
Fitting new pair of barrels to Boss gun 6525*, and restocking fore end as per enclosed invoice with discount (*work done by Boss and invoiced at cost, 12½% trade discount passed on to WWD)*	£37	8	0
A pair of finest quality 12 bore sidelock ejector guns, 13802 13803	£220	0	0
Best oak and pigskin case, lined velvet, gilt furniture	£13	15	0
Box pattern pigskin bound case cover with pouch	£5	12	6
2 Selvyt lined gun covers with initials	£2	0	0
Stamping initials on case cover in old English gilt		3	0
Engraving crest and initials on plate in lid of case		10	0
Set of 12 bore finest quality accessories	£2	17	6
TOTAL	**£452**	**2**	**3**

*Shortly after this invoice was tendered Dowding sold the pair of Boss guns 6525/26, which he had bought through Wilkes in 1932 back to them, and Wilkes then resold them to Vaughan on 30th Sept 1936 for £125/0/0.

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Appendix 6 – Local Workshop Suppliers to Wilkes 1939 to 1955

Name	Address	Business	Supplying e.g.	Distance
Austins	62 Brewer St	Hardware	Charcoal	200 yds
Burgess & Galer	51 Brewer St	Ironmongers	Steel Wool, abrasives.	200 yds
R.M.Cattle	Poland St	Timber yard	Hard and softwood and band sawing	200 yds
Challenge Oils	Stoke Newington	Oils and lubricants wholesaler	Rangoon and Vaseline	5 miles
J.R.Cooke & Sons	58 Broadwick St	Whip & Stick manufacture	Walking sticks	150 yds
Henry Cooper & Co	24 Greek St	Manufacturing Chemists	Hardening and blacking chemicals	½ mile
Floyd & Pulsford	40 Warwick St, Regent St	Designers and engravers	Naming, ovals, monograms	200 yds
HAC Engineers Ltd	45 Broadwick St	General engineers and sheet metal work	Manufacturing of custom parts	150 yds
House Bros	52 Brewer St	Ironmongers, Cutlers and Toolmakers.	Abrasives, tools and iron and steel stock	250 yds
Matthews Bros	154 Charing Cross Rd	Ironmongers	Nuts, bolts, screws etc.	¾ mile
Morrell's Stores	37 Carnaby St	Polish, varnish and stain manufacturer	Linseed, Colza, dryers, shellac and alkanet	200 yds
Padgett & Braham	48/50 Broadwick St	Gold and silversmiths	Ovals and engraving initials	150 yds
Samuel Peace & Sons	21 Britton St Clerkenwell	Steel and File manufacturers	Files, cutting tools and tool steel	1½ miles
J.C.Player & Co.	44 Lexington St	Leather Gilders, stampers	Case and leatherware stamping	50 yds
Ch Ramstein & Co	79 Dean St	Engineer's and jeweller's tools	Workshop tools	¼ mile
T.H.Shardlow	15 Broad(wick) St	Ironmonger	Glue	150 yds
J.R.Stebbings	6 Warwick St	Machine engravers	Naming barrels etc	200 yds
H Tuhrim	77 Beak St	Electrical Contractor	Wiring and lighting	5 yds

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Appendix 7 – Jeffery, Rigby & Lloyd Rifles Made by Wilkes in Beak Street

1945 to 1968

W.J. Jeffery Bolt Action Rifles

Calibre .220	Nos. 143594, 158354
Calibre.220 Swift	No. 40486
Calibre .243WR	No. 43402
Calibre .275	Nos. 40305, 40308, 40331, 40333, 40346, 40355
Calibre .30/06	Nos. 40031, 40316, 40328, 40329, 40369, 40370, 40440, 40452, 40480
Calibre .318	Nos. 28341, 40001 – 40011
Calibre .333	No. 40513
Calibre .375 & .375 magnum	Nos. 23, 24 (both probably renumbered) 38742, 40323, 40332, 40337- 40345, 40358, 40349, 40354, 40357, 40359, 40360, 40361, 40363, 40364, 40366, 40367, 40372, 40375, 40377, 40378, 40380, 40383, 40385, 40386, 40388 – 40390, 40392 - 40397, 40403 – 40409, 40411, 40415, 40420, 40423, 40425, 40428, 40435 - 40438, 40442, 40445, 40447 - 40450, 40453 – 40457, 40459 - 40463, 40466 -40468, 40472, 40476, 40479, 40481, 40482, 40484, 40485, 40487, 40488, 40489, 40491, 40492, 40498, 40505, 40511,40514, 40559, 40592, 40593, 41683, 41688, 41708, 43093.
Calibre .404 & .404 magnum	Nos. 27834, 28071, 28291, 28898, 38679, 38744, 38747, 40302, 40303, 40309, 40310, 40310, 40312, 40314, 40315, 40317, 40319, 40320, 40326, 40327, 40334 – 40336, 40347, 40350 – 40353, 40356, 40348, 40362, 40365, 40368, 40373, 40376, 40379, 40381, 40382, 40384, 40391, 40398 – 40402, 40410, 40412, 40416, 40418, 40419, 40421, 40422, 40424, 40427, 40431 - 40434, 40439, 40441, 40443, 40444, 40446, 40451, 40464, 40465, 40470, 40471, 40473- 40475, 40477, 40478, 40490, 40493 – 40497, 40499 – 40504, 40506 - 40508, 40510, 40512, 40515, 40517, 40519, 40521 - 40524, 40565- 40570, 40573, 40597 – 40600, 48743, 52924.
Calibre .458	No. 3818
Calibre 6.5mm	No. 40414
Calibre 7 mm	Nos. 38666, 38667, 38669, 40413, 40601,
Calibre 7.9mm	No. 40012, One unnumbered
Calibre 8 mm	No. 23755
Calibre 10.75mm	No. 96019

W.J. Jeffery Double Rifles

.450/.400 Sidelock	No. 38704
.475 No2 Boxlock	Nos. 40417. 40429, 40430

John Rigby Bolt Action Rifles

Calibre .243	No. 6081

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Calibre .275	Nos. 5993, 6042, 6043, 6080, 6082, 6083, 6085, 6086, 6103, 6109, 6110, 6115, One un-numbered.
Calibre .350	No. 5990
Calibre .404	No. 6047
Calibre .416 & .416 mag	Nos. 6009, 6015, 6018, 6020, 6037, 6039, 6041, 6051, 6052, 6054 – 6064, 6069, 6070, 6073, 6075 - 6079, 6084, 6089 - 6091, 6105, 6108
Calibre .458 Win	No. 6068

John Rigby Double Rifles

.350 Sidelock	Unnumbered
.350 Boxlock	Unnumbered
.470 Boxlock	Nos. 18157, 18276 -18278

David Lloyd Bolt Action Rifles

Calibre .244	Nos. 161, 170, 173
Calibre .264	No. 202

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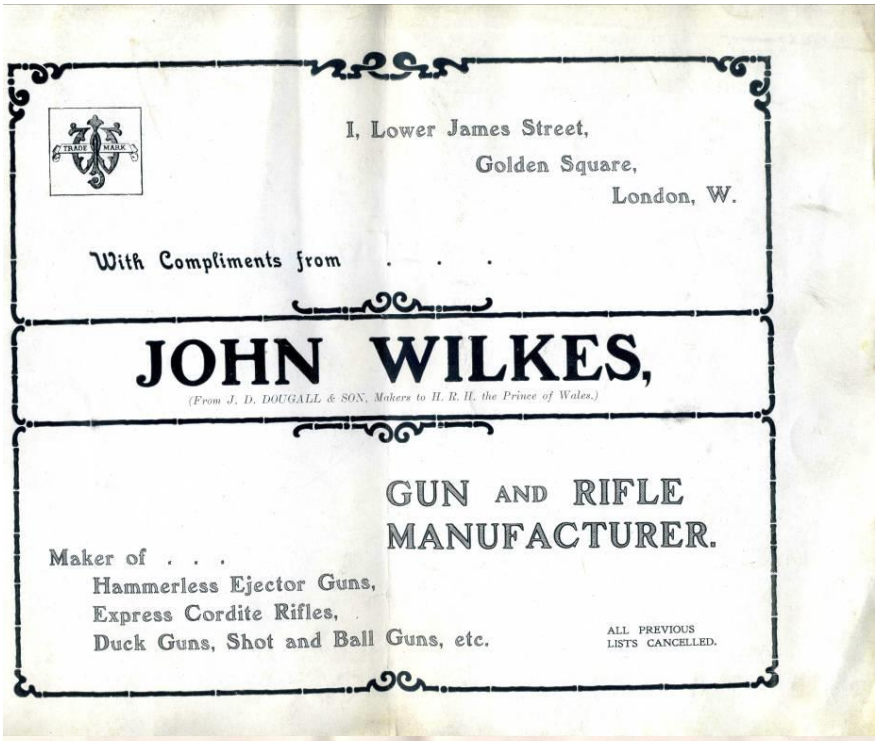
Appendix 8 - John Wilkes Catalogue *ca* 1910



1, Lower James Street,
Golden Square,
London, W.

With Compliments from . . .

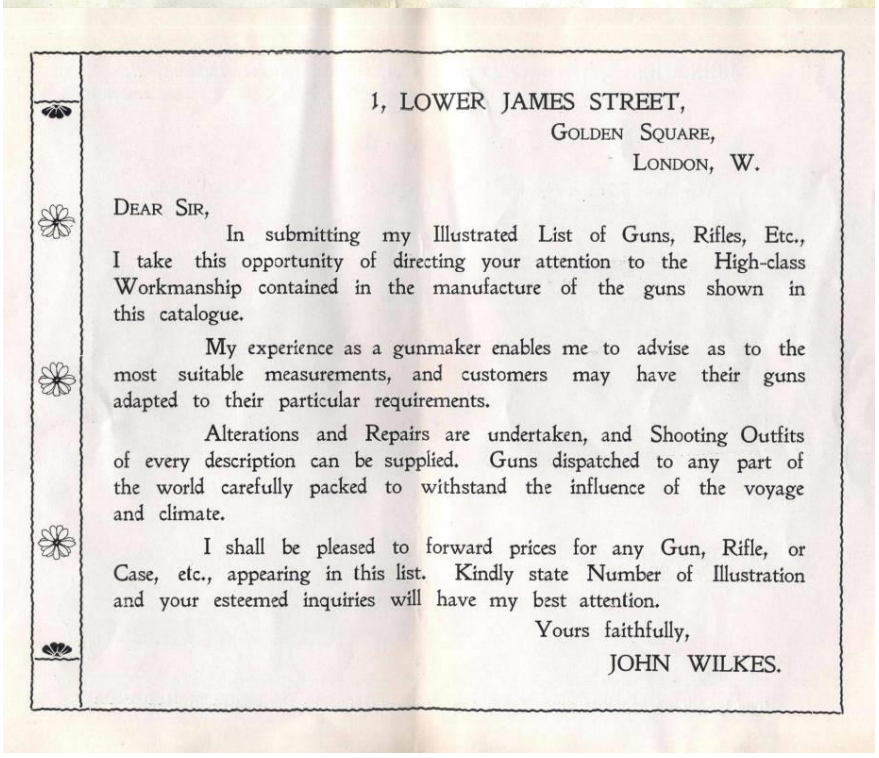
JOHN WILKES,

(From J. D. DOUGALL & SON, Makers to H. R. H. the Prince of Wales.)

GUN AND RIFLE MANUFACTURER.

Maker of . . .
Hammerless Ejector Guns,
Express Cordite Rifles,
Duck Guns, Shot and Ball Guns, etc.

ALL PREVIOUS LISTS CANCELLED.



1, LOWER JAMES STREET,
GOLDEN SQUARE,
LONDON, W.

DEAR SIR,

In submitting my Illustrated List of Guns, Rifles, Etc., I take this opportunity of directing your attention to the High-class Workmanship contained in the manufacture of the guns shown in this catalogue.

My experience as a gunmaker enables me to advise as to the most suitable measurements, and customers may have their guns adapted to their particular requirements.

Alterations and Repairs are undertaken, and Shooting Outfits of every description can be supplied. Guns dispatched to any part of the world carefully packed to withstand the influence of the voyage and climate.

I shall be pleased to forward prices for any Gun, Rifle, or Case, etc., appearing in this list. Kindly state Number of Illustration and your esteemed inquiries will have my best attention.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN WILKES.

© Stephen Grist 2018

(No. 1.) Top Lever Hammerless Ejector Gun.

Very best Workmanship and finish throughout, Steel or Damascus Barrels.

This gun is built on the most up-to-date style and is of the latest approved pattern.

LOCK OF ABOVE GUN.
A.—Safety sear.
B.—Hammer.
E.—Striker.

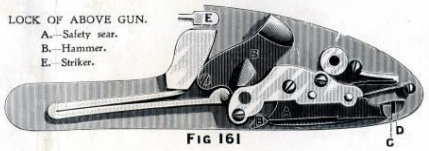


FIG 161

The length of Stock is given from the Front Trigger to the centre of Heel Plate.

(No. 2.) Top Lever Hammerless Side Lock, Single Trigger, Ejector Gun.

This Gun is made with the very finest material.

Top Lever, treble grip, hidden extension bite, with top draw bolt, single trigger as above engraving, bored either for Game or Pigeon Shooting.

The Length and Bend of any Gun altered to measurements required.

© Stephen Grist 2018

(No. 3.) Second Quality, top lever, side lock, Ejector Gun.

Steel or Damascus barrels, with raised leaves on fence of action.

Made in 12, 16, 20 and 28 bores; also made as a Non-Ejector, fitted with top automatic safety and intercepting sears. This gun is most Reliable.

Cartridge Belts and Sporting Accessories of every description supplied.

(No. 4.) A Thoroughly Genuine Ejector Gun.

Anson and Deeley top lever action, fitted with boss-bite, cross bolt or draw bolt extension.

Fitted Steel or Damascus Barrels, with Scuthcott Ejector. Finely Engraved and Finished.

Weight about six-and-a-half pounds. Specially adapted.

Complete Shooting Outfits forwarded to any part of the world at short notice.

© Stephen Grist 2018

(No. 5.) High-Class Ejector Gun, Best Workmanship.

Second Quality, top lever, Hammerless Anson and Deeley Gun.

Steel or Damascus Barrels, fitted with intercepting safety sears, Highly Engraved and finished; Shooting guaranteed.

This Gun is also supplied as a Non-Ejector.

Gentlemens' Old Guns taken in part payment for New Ones.

(No. 6.) A Superior Ejector or Non-Ejector Gun.

Third Quality, Steel or Damascus Barrels, Anson and Deeley Action,

Specially adapted to Customers' Measurements.

This is a sound, good all-round Gun, and can be thoroughly recommended for heavy use.

Weight, about six-and-a-half pounds.

Repairs and Alterations carried out with Promptitude.

© Stephen Grist 2018

(No. 7.) Special Ejector Pigeon Gun.

Side Clips on Action, treble grip, fitted with Cross Bolt, Boss-bite or Draw-back Bolt, extension bite. The Barrels are fitted Steel or Damascus. Anson and Deeley Action.

These Barrels are specially built and bored for the 2½ and 3 inch Case, Straight or Pistol Grip Stock, finely Engraved and Finished.

Guns can be altered to suit Customers' Measurements.

(No. 8.) Jungle Gun, Shot and Ball.

This Gun is specially Designed and Built for Big Game Shooting and sighted up to 250 and 300 yards if required.

Straight or Pistol Grip, Automatic Trigger Safety and Hammer Safety Scars, made in Anson and Deeley or Side Lock Action. Finely Engraved and Finished.

The above gun is of the best workmanship and material and can be thoroughly recommended.

© Stephen Grist 2018

(No. 9.) Top Lever, Hammerless, Box-Lock, Non-Ejector Gun.

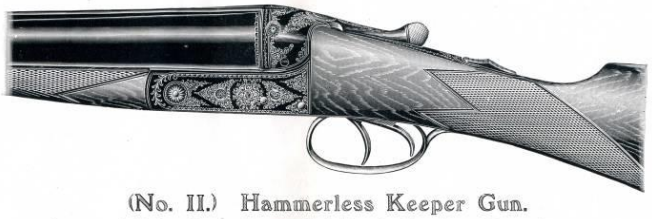
Fitted with Boss-bite Extension, Treble Grip, Straight or Half Pistol Hand, as Illustration.

Steel or Damascus Barrels. Fine Scroll Engraved,
Thoroughly Reliable.

Rook and Rabbit Rifles, Repeating Rifles, Duck Guns, Etc., supplied.

(No. 10.) Top Lever Hammerless Keeper Gun, Fine Scroll Engraved.

Fitted with Cross Bolt Extension, Automatic Safety, Steel Barrels. This Gun can also be adapted for hard use, Shooting guaranteed. Perfect Pattern.



(No. 11.) Hammerless Keeper Gun.

Anson and Deeley Action, Siemen Steel Barrels, Top Lever, Patent fore part, Modified Choke or Cylinder Barrels.

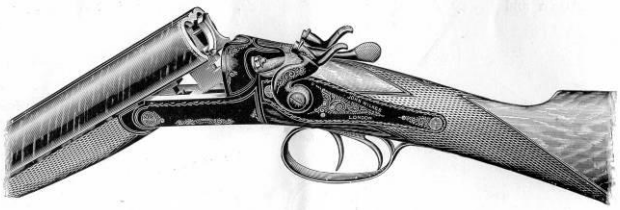
This Gun can be thoroughly recommended for all round Shooting.

All Guns appearing in this List are proved with the Latest Nitro Powders.

© Stephen Grist 2018

(No. 12-13.) "Farmer and Colonist" Guns.

Top Lever, Ear Hammer, Rebounding Locks, Steel or Damascus Barrels, Patent Fore-end, Low Hammers out of Line of Sight, Choke, Cylinder or Modified; also with Half Pistol Grip Stock.



Top Lever, Back action Hammer, Especially built for abroad and rough work, very strong, good sound workmanship throughout, 12-bore, 2ft. 6in. Barrels, Patent Fore-end, 14½in. Stock (or to Customers' Measure.)

Guns of every description supplied and fitted to Customers' Requirements.

(No. 14.) Double Hammerless High Velocity Cordite Express Rifles.

In all Bores, Ranging from 400/360 to 600 Bore.

(For Cartridges, see Page 17.)

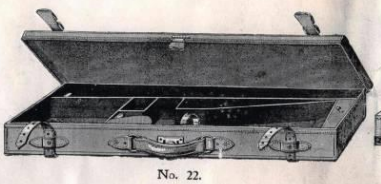
(No. 15.) Single Falling Block, High Velocity Cordite Rifles.

These Rifles are Specially Designed and Built for all the Various Sizes of High-power Cordite Cartridges. Fitted with Top Automatic Trigger Safetys and are the Strongest and most Reliable Weapons made.

The above Rifles can be Engraved Scroll as Illustration, or Big Game.

© Stephen Grist 2018

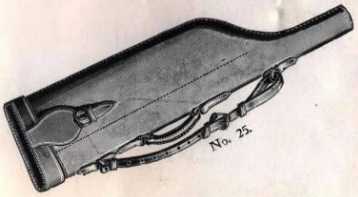
Leather Gun Cases with Fittings.



No. 22.

No. 24.

No. 23.

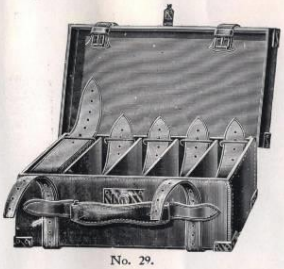


No. 25.

All Gun Cases are of the Best Manufacture and Fitted complete.

Cartridges, Magazines, Canvas Gun Covers, Etc.

No. 26.



No. 29.

No. 27.

No. 33.

No. 28.

No. 31.

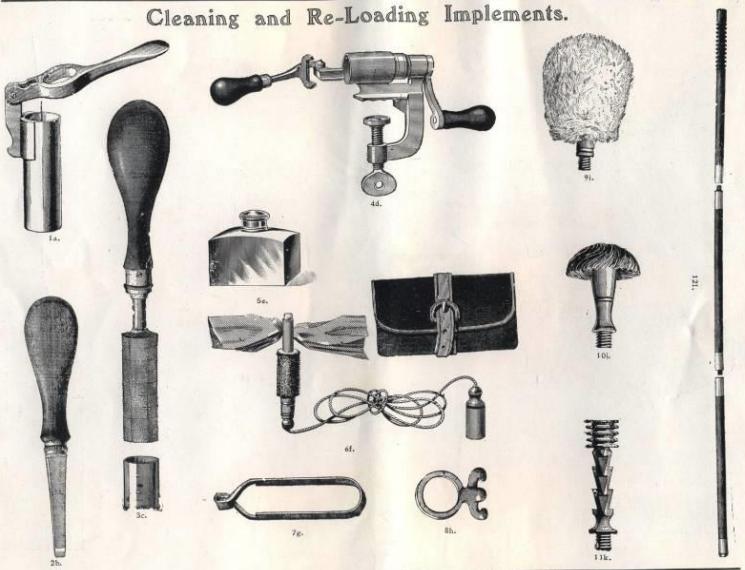
No. 32.

Inanimate Bird Traps of every description to order.

© Stephen Grist 2018

16 JOHN WILKES, 1, Lower James Street, Golden Square, London, W.

Cleaning and Re-Loading Implements.



Accessories for Sporting purposes dispatched to any part of the Country at short notice.

JOHN WILKES, 1, Lower James Street, Golden Square, London, W.

Gun and Sporting Rifle Ammunition.

Table of Pressure, Velocity and Energy of Express Cartridges.

Cartridges.	Charge. Grains of Cordite.	Bullet. Grains.	Pressure in Tons. per sq. inch.	Muzzle Velocity in Feet per sec.	Muzzle Energy in Foot-Pounds.	Striking Velocity at 100 yds. in Feet per sec.	Striking Energy at 100 yds. in Foot-Pounds.
·600 Bore ...	100	900	—	1800	6510	1592	5092
·577 „ 3 inch	90	650	10	2000	5805	1775	4572
·500 „ „	80	570	15	2170	5990	1953	4850
·450 „ „	70	480	16·0	2200	5186	1985	4222
·450 „ No. 2	80	480	13·5	2175	5037	1968	4126
·500/450 Bore ...	70	480	12	2100	4725	1900	3867
·450/400 „	60	400	17·5	2200	4322	1996	3557
·400/360 „	40	300	15·5	1950	2530	1764	2071

Johnson Bros., Printers,
London and Attleboro', Norfolk.

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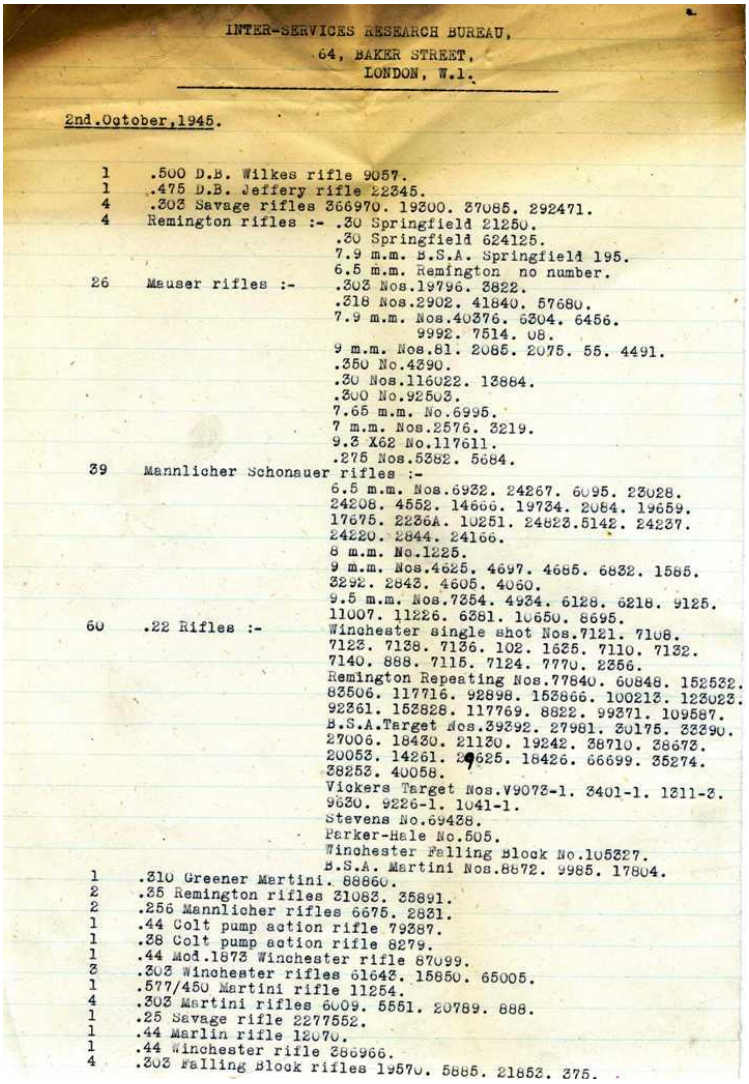
Appendix 9 - Inventory of Weapons & Ammunition bought from ISRB

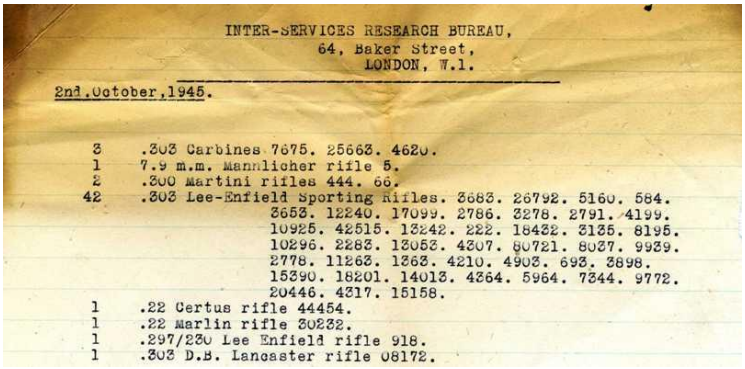
October 1945



INTER-SERVICES RESEARCH BUREAU,
64, BAKER STREET,
LONDON, W.1.

2nd.October,1945.

1	.500 D.B. Wilkes rifle 9057.	
1	.475 D.B. Jeffery rifle 22345.	
4	.303 Savage rifles 366970. 19300. 27085. 292471.	
4	Remington rifles :-	.30 Springfield 21250.
		.30 Springfield 624125.
		7.9 m.m. E.S.A. Springfield 195.
		6.5 m.m. Remington no number.
26	Mauser rifles :-	.303 Nos.19796. 3822.
		.318 Nos.2902. 41840. 57680.
		7.9 m.m. Nos.40376. 6304. 6456. 9992. 7514. 08.
		9 m.m. Nos.81. 2085. 2075. 55. 4491.
		.350 No.4290.
		.30 Nos.116022. 13884.
		.300 No.92503.
		7.65 m.m. No.6995.
		7 m.m. Nos.2576. 3219.
		9.3 X62 No.117611.
		.275 Nos.5382. 5684.
39	Mannlicher Schonauer rifles :-	6.5 m.m. Nos.6932. 24267. 6095. 23028. 24208. 4552. 14666. 19734. 2084. 19659. 17675. 2236A. 10251. 24823.5142. 24237. 24220. 2844. 24166.
		8 m.m. No.1225.
		9 m.m. Nos.4625. 4697. 4685. 6832. 1585. 3292. 2843. 4605. 4060.
		9.5 m.m. Nos.7354. 4934. 6128. 6218. 9125. 11007. 11226. 6381. 10650. 8695.
60	.22 Rifles :-	Winchester single shot Nos.7121. 7108. 7123. 7138. 7136. 102. 1625. 7110. 7132. 7140. 888. 7115. 7124. 7770. 2356.
		Remington Repeating Nos.77840. 60848. 152522. 83506. 117716. 92898. 152866. 100213. 123023. 92261. 152828. 117769. 8822. 99371. 109587.
		B.S.A.Target Nos.29292. 27981. 30175. 32290. 27006. 18430. 21130. 19242. 38710. 38672. 20053. 14261. 29625. 18426. 66699. 35274. 38252. 40058.
		Vickers Target Nos.V9073-1. 3401-1. 1311-2. 9530. 9226-1. 1041-1.
		Stevens No.69438.
		Parker-Hale No.505.
		Winchester Falling Block No.105227.
		B.S.A. Martini Nos.8872. 9985. 17804.
1	.310 Greener Martini. 88860.	
2	.35 Remington rifles 21082. 25891.	
2	.256 Mannlicher rifles 6675. 2831.	
1	.44 Colt pump action rifle 79387.	
1	.38 Colt pump action rifle 8279.	
1	.44 Mod.1873 Winchester rifle 67099.	
3	.303 Winchester rifles 61643. 15850. 65005.	
1	.577/450 Martini rifle 11254.	
4	.303 Martini rifles 6009. 5551. 20789. 888.	
1	.25 Savage rifle 2277552.	
1	.44 Marlin rifle 12070.	
1	.44 Winchester rifle 286966.	
4	.303 Falling Block rifles 19570. 5885. 21852. 375.	



INTER-SERVICES RESEARCH BUREAU,
64, Baker Street,
LONDON, W.1.

2nd.October,1945.

3	.303 Carbines 7675. 25663. 4620.	
1	7.9 m.m. Mannlicher rifle 5.	
2	.300 Martini rifles 444. 66.	
42	.303 Lee-Enfield Sporting Rifles.	3683. 26792. 5160. 584. 3653. 12240. 17099. 2786. 3278. 2791. 4199. 10925. 42515. 13242. 222. 18432. 3135. 8195. 10296. 2283. 13053. 4207. 80721. 8027. 9939. 2778. 11263. 1263. 4210. 4903. 693. 3898. 15390. 18201. 14013. 4364. 5964. 7344. 9772. 20446. 4317. 15158.
1	.22 Certus rifle 44454.	
1	.22 Marlin rifle 30232.	
1	.297/230 Lee Enfield rifle 918.	
1	.303 D.B. Lancaster rifle 08172.	

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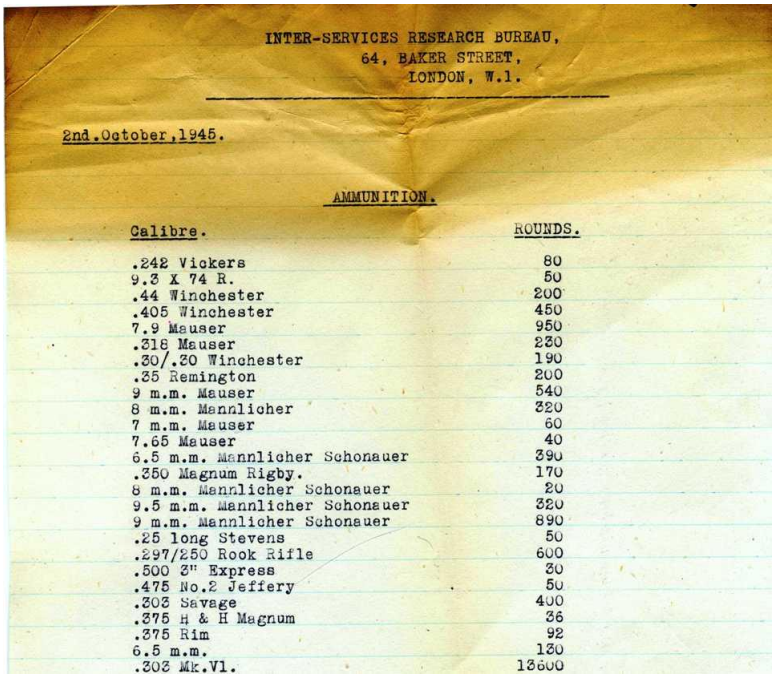

INTER-SERVICES RESEARCH BUREAU,
64, BAKER STREET,
LONDON, W.1.

2nd.October,1945.

AMMUNITION.

Calibre.	ROUNDS.
.242 Vickers	80
9.3 X 74 R.	50
.44 Winchester	200
.405 Winchester	450
7.9 Mauser	950
.318 Mauser	230
.30/.30 Winchester	190
.35 Remington	200
9 m.m. Mauser	540
8 m.m. Mannlicher	320
7 m.m. Mauser	60
7.65 Mauser	40
6.5 m.m. Mannlicher Schonauer	390
.350 Magnum Rigby.	170
8 m.m. Mannlicher Schonauer	20
9.5 m.m. Mannlicher Schonauer	320
9 m.m. Mannlicher Schonauer	890
.25 long Stevens	50
.297/250 Rook Rifle	600
.500 3" Express	30
.475 No.2 Jeffery	50
.303 Savage	400
.375 H & H Magnum	36
.375 Rim	92
6.5 m.m.	130
.303 Mk.VI.	13600

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References

The following sources have been drawn on throughout without any specific reference in the text.

A. The ledgers and other surviving records of John Wilkes, Gun & Rifle Makers
B. Catalogues and related information from the following auctioneers: - Christie, Manson & Woods Ltd; Sotheby's; Bonhams; Messrs Knight, Frank & Rutley; Holt and Co (including Holt & Kidner); Gavin Gardiner Ltd.
C. UK Census, Probate and Registrar records accessed mainly via the Ancestry.co.uk
D. Various other websites, notably those relating to the histories of London and Birmingham, notably www.birminghamgunmuseum.com ; www.british-history.ac.uk; and to inflation data www.measuringworth.com.
E. The following published sources are referenced in the text by number

1	Akehurst, Richard	*Game Guns and Rifles*	Bell	1969
2	Austyn, Christoper	*Gun Engraving*	Sportsman's Press	1998
3	Baker, David J	*The Royal Gunroom at Sandringham*	Phaidon Christie's	1989
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